

AN AUSTRALIAN WOOING

Sophie
Osmond



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AN AUSTRALIAN WOOING

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By SOPHIE OSMOND

A STORY OF TRADE
A GOLD-MINE AND
A GHOST

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TO
AUSTRALIA AND AUSTRALIANS
IN THE WISH TO DO SOME GOOD

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An Australian Wooing

CHAPTER ONE

Opulence makes a good nest.

THE Launching Place was a garden in the heart of the Australian mountains, with a fairy lake where water-lilies shone like pale stars, and beyond the lake a border of shrubs and trees from all over the world.

Two stately pines from Switzerland, some Himalayan blackberries which took kindly to the climate and bore fruit ; roses that clambered on pergolas higher than their ancestors ever did ; a great white tree that burst into bloom at Christmas, called " Lily of the Valley " from the resemblance its pendant flowers bore to the little English bulbs.

The garden rose in terraces until the topmost walk was like a hilltop, whence a cunningly devised descent led down to a long and tortuous fern gully with an elusive creek creeping in and out among the shadows.

The formation of the house was not due to any emanation from an architect's brain, but from the sheer perseverance of the rooms themselves in seeking front places to look at the view. They shouldered one another onward, squashing two of the weakest into a passage ; tossing two of the smallest upward so that they caught and clung to the roof, attracting all the

flying seeds from the garden until they were crowned with springtime glory.

Then someone with an inspiration worthy of the Parnassian gods swung a balcony beneath, where it hung like a boat with a cargo of flowers swaying in the sunshine.

The house itself was as it had been from the beginning, a squat one-storey mushroom of a place, with a wing here, a billiard room there, a corridor running in from the topmost terrace of the garden, a conservatory to balance the corridor, and odd little verandas dumped in wherever they could get.

It made a pretty grouping, and the present owner, Mr. Joseph Ireton, had the sense to leave it as he bought it.

Only wealthy people could live at The Launching Place, for the upkeep demanded the attention of a staff of gardeners and out-servants. It was over ten miles from a railway station, and the stables held the best horses in the district, with a varied string of vehicles. A motor was added to please Mrs. Ireton, who liked to feel in touch with the times ; Ireton himself loved his horses and brought the open-air taste and training of an English boyhood to bear on his pursuits.

He did not make his money as an Australian pastoralist, though he worked hard enough for a good twenty years of his life. When he met Teresa Diss, a widow with a little daughter, Joseph Ireton did not possess two half-crowns to jingle together. She passed as rich, and he had no sort of scruple about proposing. From that hour he prospered.

A legacy was left him ; he won money with his horses ; he made a deal in wool.

The purchase of The Launching Place was not accomplished all at once ; there was some pinching and scraping to manage it. That passed, and Ireton invited every kinsman he had ever heard of to sample his hospitality.

They came, not in single spies but in battalions, and sent their friends and their friends' friends with letters of introduction, occasionally with appeals for assistance. The "Place" was like a caravanserai. Ireton loved his countrymen and never noticed the snobbishness that disfigured some of them.

Thus came Lady Rose Allway to The Launching Place, the daughter of a peer and the widow of a commoner, with a position much more assured than an income, but possessing a brain that was a little gold mine of ideas.

Lady Rose never made the mistake that the favour of the gods was solely for her own class ; but she knew who were the favoured of the gods and trimmed her bark accordingly. A pleasant woman to meet if she thought you worth meeting ; a good talker but a better listener ; a traveller ; of course, a writer, for whenever did a titled woman not turn her travels to account with so many scores of sub-writers ready to do the "ghosting" ?

The fine arts Lady Rose left unnoticed ; she had no use for them, but she was a very bodkin in business.

Her own class understood and accepted her word for her recommendations, because, and this was the secret of the woman's success, Lady Rose never took up anything or anybody without being assured of her money's worth. She steered clear of damaged reputations ; the speckled peaches were not for her hand.

This could not be known in Australian society, and Lady Rose had cleverly engineered the sale of an old Jacobean house in Norfolk to a squatter ; a diamond necklet to his wife ; and a Point d'Alençon veil to his sister before she was a fortnight under the Southern Cross.

She was at little cost for hotel expenses, for her letters of introduction insured her a cordial welcome. Some of the more feather-brained hostesses lost their reason in the delight of entertaining an earl's daughter. The

earl's daughter assessed the situation in her wide-open stare and recommended Bond Street tradesmen.

In due time she became the guest of the Iretons, to find matter really to her mind, for in less than a week she was hotfoot on a deal to launch Nora Diss, Ireton's stepdaughter, in London society.

Nora was beautiful, well-educated, animated ; contrasted against others more highly born she would not lose ; her vitality was not vulgar. Though the patrician lady's eyes noted points of disadvantage, the girl's own sense could be trusted to obliterate them.

One little imp of doubt assailed Lady Rose. She could not get the amount of Nora's fortune. She assumed it to be something worth while ; but the Iretons ignored her finesse in probing. Though Nora was twenty-two, she seemed to have no settlements or income save the allowance from her stepfather. While her mother talked of the estate of her late husband, Tom Diss, she never mentioned what or where the estate was.

Lady Rose found The Launching Place a very comfortable spot, more luxurious than some of her haunts in England. She was much too wise to be astonished. Everything in the world goes to Australia now ; money can move mountains. Inwardly she was consumed with curiosity to get at the l.s.d. of the matter.

There was still the *quid pro quo* to settle. Perhaps Mrs. Ireton was shy of approaching a delicate subject ; her astute visitor determined to give her a lead.

This was her usual course. A word of praise, a smile of advice, a gentle sigh for her own straitened circumstances that prevented her from doing the good she wished ; a hope for better things, and the bait took.

Lady Rose had met people who would have poured out a sack of gold at her feet to be taken up by her capable hands. Sometimes she took the sack ; sometimes not.

Joseph Ireton repeated club gossip to his wife : that Lady Rose had the reputation of floating a wealthy Australian woman in London society, including a presentation at Court. The cost was ten thousand pounds. All of it did not go into Lady Rose's pouch ; some went to pay for entertainments, a house near Park Lane, visits to the prescribed haunts, gowns, wines, and allied items. The ten thousand pounds covered the cost of the season—and Lady Rose.

The Australian was worth it. Apart from her money bags she had a casket from the fairies with three possessions : a neck like the Venus de Milo, a talent for piano-playing almost professional in its completeness, and the knack of never making a fool of herself in flirtations.

Given these qualities, *plus* a gold mine, any woman might gain the heaven she desired—under the wing of an earl's daughter.

Joseph Ireton meant to do handsomely by his step-daughter in recognition of what her father's money had done for him. It had set him on his feet. That money was going back now with compound interest.

Through a brother in the Admiralty the introduction to Lady Rose had been compassed. It was the chance Ireton was waiting for ; club gossip is helpful when it goes in the right ear.

Nora Diss was stately, frank, and assured ; flashing with vitality and full of ideas on whatever subject came uppermost ; bright-haired, bright-eyed, brightly smiling. Her eyes made friends for her before ever she spoke, whether with shepherd or squatter ; dancing, glowing, softening, dreaming. Velvet eyes in a magic loom someone likened them to ; the girl's soul stood in her eyes.

She had steered a charity bazaar to a successful finish by the novelty of her plan. The sellers were all " Daughters of the Sun " and " Men of the Moon " ; the former selling everything literally under the sun for

nothing less than gold coins, and the men of the moon doing the drab work for paler silver. Nobody took coppers.

Nora Diss was of course high priestess, resplendent in gold embroideries and fantastic symbols, burnished and faceted to catch a thousand lights ; with shining amulets and a coronet of twinkling stars. All the sunmaids were similarly attired, and beautiful ; the moonmen were allowed a free hand to make themselves as grotesque as possible, and great was the fun thereof.

Wherever a sunmaid moved to do her selling a moonman followed with a bundle of sticks on his back. As men and maids paid for their clothes, and the bazaar advertised itself, the charity gained two thousand pounds.

Naturally Nora Diss was considerably run after, and known as the " Daughter of the Sun," a circumstance that developed a confidence in herself tending to make Lady Rose Allway gasp.

The girl had it in her to be a leader ; she would march on to the climax of her career whatever it was—the escapades of high-spirited youth would be neutralized by a level and well-balanced head.

CHAPTER TWO

Some cobwebs are invisible, yet none the less secure.

THE three women were having tea in a little pagoda overlooking the lake. A hint of blazing November sunshine made the afternoon languorous and brought out the first cool gowns of the season. Of the three, Mrs. Ireton looked the most dressed, for she was given to steering by the fashion plates—unnecessary to an earl's daughter.

She was much like Nora in appearance, keeping up the resemblance with art when nature gave out, and a firm believer in making the most of herself. Lady Rose's cast-iron complexion and abbreviated nose caused her to marvel, when it would have been so easy to effect an improvement by means of skin foods and nose shapers, if advertisements were to be trusted.

For a veritable blue-blooded patrician her guest lacked several qualities usually ascribed to rank. But one point Lady Rose possessed that no other woman dared to compass, a full stare from a pair of stony blue eyes that might have been blossoms plucked from her three-century family tree and pickled for preservation.

Lady Rose made a pretence of work as she sipped her tea. She always carried Irish crochet. It took up little room and was intended as a gift to her hostess of the hour. The wily widow knew the charm of work from her aristocratic hands. Mrs. Ireton was aware that the collar was being made for her, and longed for the supreme moment of showing it to her friends with the

addendum, "Lady Rose made it for me when she was staying with us. Isn't it sweet?"

Her guest was manipulating another kind of hook. Nora was absorbed in a question of outfit.

"I shouldn't get too many things, Nora. You will want to shop in Paris and see the very latest. By the way, we haven't decided how long we are to stop in Paris."

"It rests with you, Lady Rose," said Mrs. Ireton.

"Oh, do you mean I arrange the details to please myself?"

"Why, didn't we settle it that way?"

"Did we? Oh, yes, I remember you said I was to arrange everything. I always stay at the Ritz. A fortnight would give ample time for shopping, because, after all, London is as good as Paris for gowns if one knows where to go."

"Nora is quite in your hands, Lady Rose."

"I'll make my luggage as small as possible and travel light," put in Nora. "Only take my virtues, and leave my vices behind."

"You mean I have *carte blanche* in the matter of buying?"

"In everything."

"Ah, then, perhaps we had better jot down items. By the way, have you arranged with your bank about the transfer of money? Or will Nora take a bank draft with her?"

"It is about that very subject I would like to talk, Lady Rose." Lady Rose could not avoid a brightening of the eyes. This was to her mind.

"Do you mean that you would like me to estimate the possible expenditure?"

"Yes."

Mrs. Ireton moved a teaspoon unnecessarily, feeling a difficulty in expressing herself.

"Both my husband and myself are wishful that Nora should have every advantage. At the same time we

are sensible that we must not trespass on your kindness without some adequate return, only we are at a loss how to put it. Of course Mr. Ireton pays all the expenses as he said at first, but this does not discharge our indebtedness to you. I suggested—and my husband agreed—that the best way was to place a bank draft at your own disposal, and let Nora settle her own debts out of her own money. Perhaps it is rather a coarse way of expressing myself, but in money matters one has to be straightforward and plain speech is unavoidable.”

“ I have an Englishwoman’s liking for plain speech,” said Lady Rose. “ If it were more freely used there would be less duplicity.”

Even the devil can praise holy water.

“ I am delighted. A bank draft for four figures, say one thousand pounds.”

“ If I do not find it sufficient I can easily let you know,” replied Lady Rose coolly.

Mrs. Ireton gave a perceptible start.

“ That has nothing to do with Nora’s allowance. It is for you. The general expenses Mr. Ireton will defray.”

“ I understand. It may be sufficient ; perhaps not, I cannot say off-hand. Of course you know I must take a town house for the season, as well as rent a place in the country, in addition to the spas, the Highlands, and other resorts. I presume Mr. Ireton will sanction and settle these expenses? ”

“ Then what do you——”

“ Let’s jot down the items and you can judge for yourself.”

Thereupon the wideawake visitor reeled off an agenda that made her hostess blink. Though she remembered the club story of the ten thousand pounds’ expenditure on one woman’s wooing of London society, she did not think a girl would cost anything like that sum. Besides, Lady Rose would have to live in any case.

Lady Rose was quick enough to read a danger signal in her companion's astonishment and deftly remodelled her list. She did not want to lose the undertaking, and a thousand pounds just then would have been a godsend.

Still, Australia was a moneyed country, and she meant to have some.

"The cost of a furnished house is thirty or forty pounds a week, cheaper, of course, on the wrong side of the Park, and seven servants are necessary: butler, cook, footman, housemaid, parlourmaid, lady's maid and kitchenmaid. In addition to upkeep there's wear and tear which brings it up to another thirty or forty pounds a week, and a private car with a chauffeur is indispensable. Thus the mere cost of living will be over a hundred pounds a week, a thousand pounds for the season. This, of course, does not cover Hurlingham, Ranelagh, Henley, Ascot, Lord's, the Derby, a box at the opera, theatres, concerts, festivities in aid of charity, and other events that vary from year to year. After this the visit abroad, to continental watering-places, invitations on the return to England, a trip to the Highlands or the Lakes. To speak truly I would not of myself think of it, but just go quietly for a tour in Spain to avoid unnecessary expense. The season is no novelty to me, indeed I hate it, and I would much sooner be travelling."

Mrs. Ireton could not ejaculate a word to all this. Though perfectly familiar with her Australian friends' records of trips to Europe and elsewhere, strung together in this fashion it was somewhat disturbing.

Lady Rose continued: "Then in the matter of wardrobe. You'll be asked two thousand francs in Paris for an evening dress that can be got for half that a month later, and the same for a race dress. Fortunately, I can take you to places in London where you can order gowns of the most perfect cut and taste for twenty guineas, and coats and skirts at fifteen. But I recommend Paris for anything ornate, though the

presentation dress must be made in England. Royalty likes it so."

Mother and daughter nodded breathlessly. What true woman does not drink in such feminine lore?

"As for hats, gloves, shoes, and the little et ceteras of a well-chosen wardrobe, it's as well to compare style in the two cities. It's easy to have a specified article sent over from Paris, but to be perfectly equipped in these small matters will run into more than a hundred pounds."

She talked on in a calm, slightly indifferent tone, as if the whole thing were so familiar through repetition that it was only of interest to a tyro on the threshold.

Mrs. Ireton yearned for the same familiarity and felt maternal greatness in ruling herself out for the benefit of her daughter.

Nora Diss found a pretext for leaving them. Something in Lady Rose's talk of money clouded her fairy dream. There is more make-believe about rose-colour than any other tint. The real true shade only exists in the land of the might-have-been, though the workaday colour is for anyone's mixing.

Lady Rose gave a quick glance after her and dropped her voice.

"I am glad we are alone. The most important matter of all has not been discussed."

"Nora's marriage—with a title?" said Mrs. Ireton in a quick undertone.

"I can compass it, but it may take time. One reason for increased outlay."

"I would sacrifice much to see Nora well married."

Lady Rose pricked up her ears. The word "sacrifice" sounded unpleasant.

"I hope you will not be called on for any such—er—emergency."

"Her father's estate will go to her, and Mr. Ireton will supplement it. He has been very good to her, as you can see."

Lady Rose never got any further than this in her probing.

"It will make all the difference in the world to have a relative in the Admiralty. Forgive my candour, but what is to be done about other family connections?"

"Oh, I want Nora to see her people. Surely it can't hurt her chances to know her own kith and kin."

"It depends on—er—on so many things."

"You mean their position in life. Well, Nora's father belonged to a manufacturing family in Manchester, and my father was a bank clerk who came out to Victoria in the gold rush. Most of my relatives are here. The Diss family may not be so well off as formerly."

It did not sound very promising to patrician ears. Lady Rose mentally decided on sweeping the Diss family into oblivion.

"Nora must settle the question for herself. Her own sense will carry her through."

"I shouldn't like her to be snobbish," said Mrs. Ireton uneasily. "Of course, she must think of her career."

"We are all snobs if it comes to that," replied Lady Rose. "Personally, I see no difference in a successful self-made man who starts a family to-day from the successful self-made man of Queen Elizabeth's time. It is just the centuries between that weave the veil of antiquity. Trade is trade. My ancestors were as mixed as anybody's three hundred years ago. I haven't the least hesitation in saying I give no heed to scores of my family connections. By the way, what is Nora's fortune? I mean, what figure may I say in the course of conversation with—er—my friends?"

"Say nothing," answered Mrs. Ireton sweetly. "Only hint. As you know, Australians are laughed at for blazoning their totals. It is so vulgar; though we are not nearly as bad as Americans."

Ireton joined them, big and bronzed and hearty, not

over shrewd or sensitive, and apt to worship wealth as the lever of the world. What was English in him still remained alive under the piled-up interests of an Australian pastoralist ; but he was untidy in his dress in a way that would have horrified his spick-and-span Admiralty brother. It was said that his wife had to steal his old suits to get rid of them, and coax him to the adoption of new substitutes.

" We are discussing Nora's visit to England," began Mrs. Ireton, as she poured out a huge cup of tea for him.

" I thought so. Have you settled everything ? "

Lady Rose tempered her wide-eyed stare into a smile.

" You might like to see the list——"

" Not a bit. I take your word for it. You do the fixing ; I do the financing—so let's understand each other."

" I have told Lady Rose of our conversation, my dear, but——"

Here Lady Rose took up the parable for herself. There was an element of coarseness about the matter that might have grated on her fine feelings if she allowed her feelings to sway her ; but seeing that the deal must be brought off expeditiously, whatever feelings she possessed ran to commercialism.

" I understand that you and Mrs. Ireton wish to make me a gift of one thousand pounds and defray all expenses ? "

" That's it."

" It's nice of you ; but wouldn't it be better to place a lump sum at my disposal and let me draw on it when necessary ? "

" What d'you call a lump sum ? " asked Ireton bluntly.

" You mean the amount ? Say—five thousand pounds."

Mrs. Ireton dropped her eyelids to prevent them

jumping wider in astonishment ; her husband sat unmoved and square-backed, taking gulps from his jorum of tea.

" Right and well, Lady Rose. You shall have five thousand pounds on this understanding—that my girl marries a title. She's as good as anybody going, and I mean her to have her chance. Her father's money gave me a leg-up, and I am not ashamed to own it."

" I'll do my best."

" Right. I'll take your word as a woman of birth and honour. How much do you want down ? "

Lady Rose gave him her stare without the smile. She expected the lump sum " down " without any more words ; but if she said so outright he might think it a slur on his reputation.

" I suppose I must leave that to you."

Ireton held out his cup for more tea, thinking in thousands.

" Half down say ; the rest when she secures the title. The sooner the better, then she'll be off your hands, and it will be clear profit to you."

For the first time a little colour crept into Lady Rose's rough skin like a warlight. His speech was downright vulgar ; for one wavering moment it was in her mind to refuse any but her own terms, but commercialism triumphed. She was in Australia to economize, while her fingers itched to be spending. After all, Ireton's bluntness was mitigated by the halo of having a brother in the Admiralty.

" Just as you please," she replied in a cool tone, that conveyed it was not as she pleased.

But Ireton's bluntness had spread to his brain, and his memory held club gossip.

They might have personified the fates in modern guise with their measuring and cutting. But the spinning was beyond their power.

CHAPTER THREE

Speech is silver—when no change is required.

GOVERNMENT HOUSE was alive with gaiety and good cheer. In the principal set of lancers several notabilities were taking part, and gossip concerning their eccentricities stirred local curiosity to the staring point.

It is permissible to stare at a dance because there is nothing else to do. Dances were primarily invented to divert the looker-on. The general stare settled on Lady Rose Allway dancing with the Prime Minister. She was so very obviously put out by his maladroitness that she frowned him into a state of frazzle.

An inch-deep bandeau of diamonds emphasized the tilt of her head and sparkled angry fire at the statesman. Despite the hauteur with which she rang the changes on the glare of her stony eyes she did not realize expectation as a high-born ladye. Still, as she may be said to have added to the gaiety of a nation, this lack of distinction was a detail.

The Prime Minister escaped at last with face cholericly red, while his partner fell tooth and claw on an aide-de-camp who was concerned in the arrangements.

"The next partner you bring me, Vincent, see that he—or it—is neither an elephant nor a bear!" she snapped.

"Do you prefer a lion or a tiger, Lady Rose?" he retorted in a dead voice. "'Tisn't any of my doing. Go for Hemmy."

It takes many people to make a world and it wants the picking of that world to make a viceregal ball representative in an Australian city. The drawing-up of an invitation list needs the wisdom of a serpent and the wariness of a weasel ; for not only has local tradition to be honoured, but attention must be shown to the tramps of various degrees of distinction who roam the country, bent on book-making, stump speaking, cash collecting, or economizing one way or another, even in such a small commodity as truth.

Many a diplomat can date his first step to a deft association with an invitation list ; not a few have come to grief over bungled efforts. More than one governor has owed his popularity to a staff, or it may be a secretary, who knew the way to work.

Then there is an inner puzzle, a riddle that has never been solved with complete satisfaction since Australian Governors were invented. This is the selection of dancers for the opening set of state lancers. If Hercules had been set this task he would have died straightaway and millions of minds would be free from the worry of learning his exploits.

It is the product of the time. Downing Street, generally in hot water or having its windows smashed for sins of omission or commission, had no hand in the problem of state lancers. It burst into maturity in the last dying kicks of the nineteenth century, when Australia went in for advertisement. The wisdom of serpents and the wariness of weasels must be swayed by a magician's wand, and no wand has ever waved bitterness of spirit from the viceregal opening set. For the Left-outs are many and the Taken-ins few.

Even doubling the dancers does not ease the heart-burning, for there is always somebody overlooked who hoped to be near the dais.

It occasionally happens that all the Governors and their wives are *en masse*, and to get these illustrious folk

footing it amiably together merits a rise in salary to the aide-de-camp who acts as sorter-out.

The titled visitors who wander from one Government House to another, not infrequently accepting smaller, or perhaps larger, hospitality from individuals, expect to have every honour. Then, indeed, one may study diplomacy in the bassinette, or human nature cutting its wisdom teeth. A distribution of those india-rubber rings called "comforters" would not be amiss.

The waltzes acted as an emollient with the aid of a supper table set forth so lavishly that travelling notabilities raised their eyebrows. The new Governor had brought his English rent roll to bear on his expenditure ; moreover he was privileged to import his own wines and spirits free of duty, and therefore did things in a way that set up a standard hard to approach by Governors compelled to live on their salaries.

The various members of the staff are expected to see to the happiness of the guests, secure partners for *débutantes*, introduce eligibles, effect introductions and make themselves useful. The first half hour is a breathless rush for the aides ; after that they have an eye to their own amusement.

One of them, the Honourable Vincent Spoylle, escorted Nora Diss to the supper room, brought her an ice and made time-honoured remarks about the weather.

"Your Australian night is trying to rival a Venetian one, Miss Diss."

"It isn't trying—it's succeeded!" she laughed lightly, and something in her tone piqued him. She did not seem impressed with his attentions, and while she was speaking she nodded to a young man approaching.

"Here is my partner for the next dance."

The aide-de-camp did not turn his head.

"Then I may retire," he said with a bow, but she paid no heed.

The Honourable Vincent Spoylle was not attracted towards Miss Diss from an amatory point of view. She was an heiress and what he considered good form and good fun, therefore fit for flirtation and eligible for his list of lady friends. From the entrance he shot a glance back, noting the new partner's eager look—the unmistakable stamp of a man in love.

"It's that Heene fellow," he thought contemptuously. "Sheep and shearing and squatting; that's all they know in this bally country. What a fool the girl is."

The new-comer had not even noticed the lordling. He was a well set-up young fellow of twenty-eight, with a clear, pleasant voice and an alertness of eye characteristic of those who have traversed great spaces, no matter whether they be at the Antipodes or the prairies, with a decidedly business-like air that reduced the festive appearance of his dress suit, causing the tiny diamond studs to seem more useful than ornamental. Neither dark nor debonair nor dandy; brown-tinted naturally in skin and hair and eyes, and gaining an extra deepening of tone from long journeys in sweltering sunshine.

Contrasted against a sprig of pedigree like the Honourable Vincent, the Australian may have lacked something that is generally held to accrue from generations of culture and refinement; an explanation as misleading as it is defective, seeing that culture and refinement have, in so many instances, run to extinction, or are only manifest in infinitesimal specks, whereas they should be in large patches to yield a convincing wash of the true metal.

Whatever it was that Richard Heene lacked from the point of view of exalted descent, the qualities that were apparent in him made him a man to trust and trade with: sincerity in his hand grip, honesty in his alert, sharp-seeing eyes, fidelity in the spoken word; popular,

though by no means hail-fellow-well-met ; with the true Australian belief in his country and his own career, a belief that has been called conceit by surface-gazers—which perhaps it is—the same form of conceit in Antipodean guise that has made England supreme as a colonizing country.

“ Our dance, Nora. ”

It was anything but a dance that he had in his thoughts. Come what would he meant to propose that night, and was impatient to get the dance over and done with to give him the fateful few minutes in the interval.

Nora Diss divined what was passing in his mind, and knew what her answer would be. Like him, too, she was eager to get to the interval, though for a different reason.

The waltz occupied them but a minute or two, when Richard Heene said brusquely :

“ Let’s go out on the terrace,” and in her tacit consent he read a good omen.

Other couples had trooped out before them, so that it was a little difficult to find a secluded corner.

Chaperons, gossips, and old cronies, who always gather in representative force at a viceregal ball, clung about the long windows that opened on the terrace ; not a seat was unoccupied. Heene’s eyes roving restlessly caught sight of a desirable nook, partly screened off by bunting ; but a fragment of white satin and a dainty shoetop showed against the Union Jack. Nora laughed at the expletive he smothered and of her own initiative led the way down the steps into the garden. Again he thought it a good omen and rushed upon his fate.

“ You know what I want to say, Nora ? ”

“ Yes, but don’t say it.”

“ Why ? I must say it. I’ve planned to say it since—since——”

“ Then forget it, Dick. I want to forget that it was in your mind at all. Yes, oh, yes, I’m like the silly

Miss Baxter, who refused a man before he axed her."

"Nora! *Don't!*"

"All right, Dick, I won't; but don't *you* either."

"I will," he said doggedly. "Some perverse fit has taken possession of you. I want——"

"But I don't want. Now, Dick, take a hint. It's never nice for a man to be refused, and I am trying to make it easy."

"Why did you come out here, then?"

"Because I wanted to get it over."

"Why did you let it reach this pass? You allowed me to think——"

"Yes, but that was before—before I knew."

"Knew your own heart, as the story-books say?"

"Knew the luck in store for me. Dick, *I'm going home!*" She gave the last three words a slow, impressive emphasis that made his heart leap.

"To England—the old country? Why, so am I! We'll meet in England, and perhaps——"

He caught her hand in a good hearty grip of delight, but she withdrew it; then as suddenly brought both her hands on his.

"See here, Dick. I'm not going to let love-making spoil my life. I'm going to see the world, and the very body and soul of me is dancing with joy. Don't you go bringing shadows across the sun."

"If you cared for me there would be no shadow."

"That's just it. I care for you enough to make me very sorry to give you pain; but, oh! the delight of the world!"

"You put number one first."

"So do you. You would like to tie me up with an engagement ring—settled, signed and sealed; but there's more in life than being engaged."

"Love should be supreme," he said weakly.

"Oh, bosh! I want life. Think of the voyage home and the marvels of travel; city after city passing like

a pageant. Then England, beautiful England, with all its fascinating towers and ruins and churches that I have dreamed about since I was a little girl learning to draw ; with meadows green, green, *green* ! I shut my eyes and see them ; with golden daffodils blossoming and larks rising to heaven's gate with their song. Oh, it seems too good to be true."

She pressed her hands before her eyes and then flung them outwards towards the stars shining in their thousands in the clear deep blue of the night. The action was significant of her ecstasy.

Dick Heene stared at her with only part comprehension. He, too, was looking forward to the trip ; but his dreams were russet beside the flaunting brocade of her fancy.

" I bet you'll be glad enough to see the sunbaked yellow of an Australian paddock before you have been long amongst the green."

She did not reply. A thought had flown into her head that brought a tinge of regret on its wings. Other girls had married and settled in England. So might she. Then she would never see Dick Heene again, and this friendship between them was too good to be lightly forgotten.

He took possession of the arm nearest him and held it against his breast, stroking the long glove and toying with the glittering bangles.

" Nora, I can wait. I'm selfish to bother you now. But when you've had your fill of England ? "

" Now you are off again. How can we tell what may happen by then ? "

" I'll never change, Nora."

" You're lucky to be so sure of yourself, Dick. I feel like a shuttlecock tossed on the battledore of destiny—and it's lovely ! Come, come, chummie, let the love-making go, and get the joy of life."

" I can't, Nora. I've made love to you since you were a little girl."

"Yes, you taught me how to play marbles, and gave me bigger glass alleys than I could buy."

"And now I would give you everything I possess."

"Only at the risk of dispossessing me. Life's still a game of marbles; but I want to buy for myself now. I am staring into the shop window of the whole world, and wondering, wondering. What's taking you to England, Dick?"

"Business," he answered, rather sullenly.

"Good. You may blossom into a merchant prince."

"The gilt's off it since you won't listen to me."

"Rubbish! I don't believe you. If I did believe you I wouldn't think much of you; but just because I think you are a splendid fellow, I don't believe you. So buckle to, young man, and become a merchant prince."

"If you'll be my princess."

"Oh, you idiot! Will nothing cure you? Come back to the ballroom."

She turned and walked up the path, though he lingered sore at heart. The moonbeams and the scented night played tricks with his senses. He felt that he had muddled what he meant to say. Once let moonbeams get control of a conversation, the result rapidly becomes a knot there's no undoing.

"Come along," she called over her shoulder. He hurried, caught her suddenly in his arms and kissed her. In that kiss a rose at her neck fell to pieces, wafting its perfume to his brain, so that its unforgotten fragrance was ever with him.

"At least I'll have a memory," he said.

In the woman's heart were two battling emotions—one a gladness in his love, and the other sorrow for what might happen in the future.

CHAPTER FOUR

A small man in authority should not wear large
armour.

THE watchful eyes of Lady Rose had noted the incident and taken a cool survey of Heene. Then with a glance of intelligence she summoned Nora to her side, whispered something, and walked over to the dais where the new Governor's wife sat, more or less a prey to anyone who swooped down upon her for a word of recognition, or conversation, or make-believe.

Though she might never know a tenth of her guests, she understood what was expected of her as figurehead-in-chief and did her duty urbanely.

There is a popular belief in Australian society that viceroyalty may not have intimate friends among the viceruled—that is, if viceroyalty wants to get on and climb the ladder to success.

Once upon a time a certain Governor's lady made friends right and left. Great was the frowning in Diplomacy Court when the news reached London. Her viceregal spouse was told it must cease ; not perhaps in words, but in winks, by a wise old wirepuller ; yet he—the viceregal spouse—smiled blandly and said it pleased the Australians. Diplomacy Court got on its hind legs.

"It's a bad example to other British dependencies. If every Governor's wife insists on making friends, there'll be no border line."

Still the same bland smile, and the lady capped her

career by setting the fashion of giving huge garden parties, inviting everybody whose signature appeared in the visitors' book. Diplomacy Court was aghast. It speedily became speechless when it heard that the Governor had made a colossal deal in speculation and was rich enough to retire from the business. But ever afterwards, so runs the legend, vicerealty—that is, feminine vicerealty—has been fettered.

“No personal friends, madam, remember.”

Sometimes madam is hard put to it to remember.

Nora Diss and her mother, Mrs. Ireton, like hundreds of others, were unknown to their new viceregal hostess. Their social position ensured an invitation and there the matter ended. But Lady Rose Allway waved her wand. Some family connecting link permitted her to call the Governor's wife by her Christian name, and be delicately familiar on state occasions.

“Constance, this is my *protégée*, Miss Diss.”

The Governor's wife shook hands with the elegant limpness then in fashion.

“I hear you are visiting England, Miss Diss. I hope you will have a very pleasant trip.”

A lifeless speech, charmingly spoken, for the viceregal lady had to ring the changes on it about a thousand times that week.

“Thank you for your kind wishes,” said Nora. “I am looking forward to it with all my heart and soul. It is like a fairy dream come true.”

“It isn't often fairy dreams come true. Perhaps if they did we should not value them so much.”

Then, giving closer heed to the girl's beauty, she asked questions, pleasantly intimate and as if interested, which so captured Nora's impulsive heart that she chattered without restraint, giving her hostess a good five minutes' entertainment that made her forget her weariness.

“I wonder whether you'll want to come back,” she smiled,

"I do not know. I am going into a fairy world, and wonder how I'll feel when I get there. Not like my ordinary mortal self. Would you like to go back, ma'am?"

But this was a question no Governor's wife may answer truthfully.

"I have not had time to think about it," was the diplomatic reply. "But England is—England."

Heene, forgetting all about partners and programmes, made a wallflower of himself with so rueful a visage that they joked him as a knight of the dolorous countenance.

Two matrons beside him fell to discussing the bandeau of diamonds as it flashed by.

"That's Lady Rose Allway. They say she keeps to princess-cut robes, no matter what the fashion is, because a sculptor told her that style suited the lines of her figure. She certainly has a wonderful figure for her age."

"She's common anyway."

"I don't think so. It's her short nose and rough skin. I wonder why she's taking up Nora Diss?"

"They have money. It's the skeleton key that unlocks all doors."

"I daresay. Lady Rose Allway doesn't look the kind of woman to play fairy godmother without good reason. I shouldn't be a bit surprised if Mrs. Ireton didn't buy that bandeau of diamonds. Perhaps that's the price. A thousand pounds would cover it; everybody knows that these titled women are always ready to do things for a consideration—in plain English, a commission. My cousin in England says they make quite a good thing out of rich Americans. So why not rich Australians? But how did the Iretons get hold of this particular coroneted female?"

"The husband has a cousin or uncle or something in the Admiralty, and he shot Lady Allway on to them

with a hint to get introductions for Nora in London society."

"The next thing we'll hear of is Nora Diss marrying a title. After all, why shouldn't she? Others have done it—I wish her luck."

Dick Heene, straining his ears not to miss a word, heard too much for his peace of mind; yet he did not like to move away. Just then an acquaintance claimed him.

"Have you been put there to subdue any undue hilarity, Heene? You look as gloomy as a blackbeetle. Come into the cardroom since you frown on dancing."

Heene followed for want of something better to do. The cardroom was in the opposite wing away from the music and bustle, but guests streamed everywhere. All the corridors were arranged with ferns and palms for sitting-out spots, and the state-rooms thrown open to the hundreds who did not care for dancing.

Three thousand invitations had been issued for this and another ball during the race week, with double that amount for a garden party to wind up the gaiety. The garden party throng was dubbed the "Great Unknown"; the lunches and dinners were for the visiting "Who's Who" of the Commonwealth.

In the cardroom the atmosphere was appreciably more serious, though nobody was playing for high stakes. Near the door stood the Honourable Vincent Spoylle. He made no movement to allow Heene to pass, and looked him through in a peculiarly irritating way. The fact that Spoylle was in his aide's uniform gave an additional sting.

"I see a table," began Heene's companion, when Spoylle cut him short.

"This room is reserved for guests holding pink *entrée* cards."

"Where is the general cardroom, then?"

"It was not considered necessary to arrange one."

"I see an unoccupied table——"

"Probably it is reserved for special guests of His Excellency's. Only special guests are privileged here. With such a crowd, some selection had to be made."

Dick Heene took fire.

"As one of the 'crowd' to receive an invitation I presume I am as much a guest as anybody else."

"Oh, if you're going to make a row about it——"

"I am not making a row about it. We have been given to understand that this is the cardroom, as it has been on previous occasions at Government House during the race festivities. I have been here before, and I see no difference between then and now."

"The pink *entrée* card makes all the difference between crowds and individuals."

"It never did before."

"It does now. It was high time some method was introduced into the arrangements."

"May I ask how do you know that I did not receive a pink *entrée* card, seeing that all such were given up at the doors?"

"I have just told you they were reserved for friends of His Excellency's. I don't even know your name, but I am perfectly sure you are merely——"

"Merely what?" demanded Heene, raising his voice angrily.

Heads began to turn, and a little group in the corridor strolled up.

"Yes, merely what? Give it up—a conundrum."

Heene's friend struck in.

"See here, Mr. Spoylle, you are exceeding your duty and trying to be offensive. Now drop it. In good old-fashioned schoolboy slang, drop it, or it'll be the worse for you. You will not be the first aide-de-camp to get sacked for incivility, and perhaps you'll not be the last. So just you shift your carcass and let us pass to that unoccupied table, or I lodge a complaint before the private secretary to-morrow."

"Oh, come away," cried Dick impatiently. "Why

bandy words with the fellow? It's his only chance of showing authority. He couldn't get a job in the old country, so he had to trot out fifteen thousand miles."

Vincent Spoylle speedily lost his composure.

"What do you mean, sir?"

"What? Oh, give it up—a conundrum."

The repetition of Spoylle's own words caused a guffaw and the group grew larger. The long, wise, colourless face of the Governor's private secretary peered over some of the shoulders. He was a diplomatist to his finger tips and noted for steering a smooth way.

Spoylle hated Australia and openly decried both place and people; this, added to scandals and debts, made him unpopular. The Australian tradesman, though overestimating the value of such a man's social standing, can never be got to understand the long credit given in England.

Heene was turning away, but changed his mind.

"No, on second thoughts, I'll test the matter. The cardroom has always been open to the Governor's guests."

"Of course, if your manners are those of a cad, I can't stop you."

"'Twould be worse for you if you tried."

"You low-born cur!" He added something under his breath that caused Heene's eyes to flash, but before a retort passed his lips a voice of quiet command made everybody start.

"Gentlemen, what is this?"

It was the Governor himself, slim and stately in his Windsor uniform, his serene gaze passing from Spoylle to Heene. The former answered:

"It is a dispute over the pink *entrée* cards, sir. I have given an explanation, but it has not been accepted."

The Governor replied in a clear, low voice:

"I do not know what the dispute is, Mr. Spoylle, nor

the explanation ; but I overheard the insult to my guest, who is the son of a much-respected Australian. You will apologize to Mr. Heene at once."

Spoyle drew himself up and looked his chief squarely in the eyes.

"That I decline to do, sir."

"Then you will send in your resignation as member of my staff. Let it be known that I asked for such."

Spoyle scarcely expected this.

"You take the surest way of ruining my career, sir."

"I have given you the alternative of apologizing. Mr. Heene, I regret this unpleasantness and trust it is at an end."

Without listening to another word the Governor walked away, a dignified figure of quiet authority, the group opening before him in silence.

"What the dickens is it all about?" asked one of the disturbed card players. "*I* didn't have a pink card."

"Nor I. That silly fool Spoyle has been up to some game ; sold invitations, I heard, and his nibs got wind of it, but couldn't prove it, so he was glad of the chance of this rumpus to shunt him. He would never have spoken so openly unless he wanted to show he wouldn't have black sheep from home saddled on him. Though he is new, he has already put his foot down on one or two other things ; declines to have his business defined by red tape, they say, and he's rich enough to snap his fingers at the whole Downing Street boiling. We're lucky to get a man like him."

Thereupon they fell into reminiscences like a couple of old cronies over the erratic doings of titled visitors and the broadcast hospitality that was shown in this corner of the empire.

CHAPTER FIVE

Gossip can grow fruit in winter.

DICK HEENE could give little time to ruminate over rejected addresses. A business project claimed him.

Engadee Station, in Gippsland, was in the market with 800 acres under cultivation, and a dwelling ; a fine property going to ruin, so it was said, and no valid reason could be adduced for its condition.

Some journalist heard of the place and published an article about it with a snapshot of the house. So strangely are the ways of life woven that out of thousands only one was interested ; that one was probably the instrument of fate.

Raban Heene wrote to his son, enclosing the cutting :

Go and see this place. If worth it, make an offer. If necessary, increase offer. The house is a dead copy of my father's old home in England.

Other instructions followed and young Heene lost no time in setting forth. The quest interested him.

The article was headed : " A Forgotten Australian Homestead."

It contained some statements that roused the wrath of the agents and provoked a threat for libel. The gist of the article was that since the death of the late owner, Stephen Merch, Engadee had gone to ruin.

Though £30,000 had been spent on it, and the house made a byword for luxurious comfort, the widow left it through some freak ; while agents secured tenants from

time to time nobody would stay there, because of strange happenings that bordered too much on the supernatural for ordinary folk's nerves, until the place remained empty and went the way of all empty houses.

Naturally Engadee speedily attained the reputation of being haunted, not by an actual ghost of conventional ideas, but by some inexplicable *presence* that permeated the place.

This kind of talk came to a head from the yarns of two terrified swagmen who, in dire straits for a shelter from the weather, broke into the house, but were driven out by something that neither spoke nor showed, yet moving with them until they fled. After that even a sundowner would hurry his footsteps when passing the gate.

Whether a crime had really been committed there and anyone had lost his life by foul play was never known, though certain officers of the Crown made a few inquiries.

The circumstances of Stephen Merch's death pointed to nothing unusual, save to emphasize a few odd incidents in his life. He was crazy over Tyrean purple dye. Once he had visited the old Phœnician city of Tyre, and become possessed of a mummy with a piece of cloth amongst its wrappings of the true Tyrean purple. This he treated with chemicals to discover its properties, and almost succeeded had not some busybody set up a shout of alarm over supposed bloodstains and brought in the police.

Merch was easily able to clear himself, but the marvellous piece of cloth was gone and the result of his work destroyed. He took it to heart and moped himself out of existence, leaving little from the wreck of a fortune save Engadee, which the widow speedily mortgaged and left.

Such was the place Dick set out to see.

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The railway journey over, the rougher travel of the bush began. Used as he was to the saddle, this was a more exciting experience than usual.

Up and down round and about, on top of one rut, skirting another ; then a jerk into a gully and a fling upwards. He traversed a few miles like this along a track that dipped into a river bed.

The river was a morass without any bottom in winter ; in summer it was a succession of treacherous waterholes.

Heene's horse went down to the saddle-flaps and gave a deadly feeling of slipping away from under him, but he whipped to keep going. The poor straining, terrified brute responded with a mighty effort and a broken girth, then reached safety.

It was a place of dead men's bones ; lives were lost, many valuable cattle and horses perished ; no old hand would cross it in winter. The seasons played high jinks here without any regard to the almanac. When the sun set a nipping wind arose, and Heene wished he had begun his journey earlier so as to accomplish it in daylight. Yet the fascination of a night in the bush appealed to him. On this ride he saw nearer to the heart of nature than ever he had dreamed before, much as he loved the grey silence.

The long dry creek, sinuous and ugly, was an uncanny landmark of the weird greyness ; a fallen gum, sprawling over a black pool, seemed to be smothering it and sucking up the water in its treacherous embrace ; in a rotten tree trunk on fire demons' tongues leapt and darted amongst the flames ; even the smoke towered to fantastic form and became the evil genius of the place.

From above a night hawk swooped down silently, yet with deadly accuracy, on a snake moving away from the heat and the glare. One thrust of the strong bill just below the reptile's head and the neck was broken.

Out of the bush Heene came on a clearance and a plain, summer temperature once more and "Camper's Well," a subject for derisive mirth in a city's civilization; an oasis in the desert to a traveller who had sampled half a dozen means of locomotion within the last twelve hours.

At first glance there seemed neither houses nor inhabitants, save a squat little weatherboard place of three rooms and a veranda, that was perhaps the gift of the fairies, for it was screened with dolichos and away from the flaming west.

There was no attempt at a garden; the river that constituted the "Well" was too far away for anyone to bother about carting water for such fantasies. It was trouble enough to get water for domestic use; as for vegetables, they were unheard of.

The overseer and his wife lived here placidly enough. To others the spot might be laughed at as the "Back of Beyond," but they found something to talk about, for there was good riding and good shooting, which meant visitors.

Several yards away was a tent where the hands slept, ever going and coming. Dotted about at two or three-mile distances were residents. It was surprising to hear how many there were.

Once a small dramatic company lost their way and struck "Camper's Well," a godsend to the inhabitants, for within an hour a rollicking open-air performance was in high swing. There were neither seats nor stage nor scenery, but no piece ever went better—never did a dead dog-weary troupe receive such heartening-up.

The overseer accepted Heene's arrival in the order of things. The agents were always sending up people to look at Engadee; bush etiquette necessitated whatever hospitality the "Well" afforded. It was primitive enough, but Heene had fared worse. The bread possessed a peculiar flavour owing to dried gum-leaves being used for kindling under the old-fashioned camp

oven, yet even this gave his palate no trouble after the first mouthful or two.

Canvas formed the interior walls, so that every word and every movement could be heard. Though the room allotted to Heene, evidently the guest chamber, had been papered, the rats had eaten away most of it and an extra dado of sacking was tacked over the holes to keep out snakes.

Naturally there was no carpet, but the floor was well put together.

Welsh, the overseer, was chary of information concerning Engadee, though ready enough to show anything in his province. An old couple were looking after the house itself and the land was portioned out into sections. There was a pile of statistics on hand to attest the yield, with an accountant's signature, but no man would base his offer on these alone.

That night Heene dreamed of Nora Diss as Diana in a garb of green and gold. In the dream she fled, leaving a silver bow on the moonlit sward. He ran to seize it, but it eluded his grasp and danced before him till it stood over a shadowy place with a Norman doorway.

Early next morning he rode over to Engadee.

CHAPTER SIX

A haunted house is the home of many echoes.

As the dwelling came into view he thought it the most English-looking building ever built in Australia, of stone with a Norman doorway and windows. He recalled his dream and smiled at the haphazard fashion thoughts of the day twist themselves at night.

The spot was undeniably picturesque, for it faced a little ridge of mountains with peaks purple and grey against the morning sky. A breakwind of pine trees stood out in a black patch beyond the house, sombre among the sunlit slopes. A fancy crept into Heene's mind as he rode along the undulating path through the paddock that these shadows held a secret.

The garden was fast relapsing into wildness, the bank of the terrace a waving luxuriance of what children call "pussy cats tails."

He entered by a side door leading to the billiard-room. A tremendous squawking and beating of wings astonished him for a moment, bringing a reminder of the ghost ; then he laughed aloud, as a startled hen flew out leaving half a dozen unprotected eggs on the billiard table.

Near the fireplace an old-fashioned piano stood in a corner and over it a portrait. He guessed it for the widow, a face of the picture type, but conveying a suggestion of insincerity, even cruelty.

With this exception the house was dismantled, as the widow had taken away whatever she fancied for an

abode in town, leaving a promiscuous collection of fixtures and furniture scattered about without heed to purpose.

Heene leaned against the window as he mused, with his gaze on the low-lying mountain chain :

"Thirty thousand pounds fooled away on it ! I believe I could get it for three. I'll make the offer anyhow."

"Ah !"

The word was more sigh than speech, yet it made him start. With the assurance of being alone in the big room came a feeling of some invisible presence close by. He even put out his hand, thinking to touch something, but his hand moved through empty air.

Like most men, he scorned a belief in ghosts, though he admitted that there might be more in nature than he could explain. That "Ah !" was too distinct for fancy.

"I'm going to sort this out," he said in a low voice.

"Who was Stephen Merch ?"

If he expected another supernatural sighing there was none ; he moved about examining everything.

Though not a large house, the emptiness and desolation gave it an air of vastness that pleased his fancy rather than otherwise. He wondered what he should do with it when he took possession, since nobody would live there.

Then he looked out again on the low-lying mountain peaks and watched the pink glow of the early morning shading off into mists, while the blotches of green trees at their base grew in size.

A sadness that was not all pain stirred his heart as he mused on possible life at Engadee, facing those mountains day in, day out.

If Nora were with him—but Nora was lost to him. She wanted her fairy world and would never return from England. If he lived at Engadee he must live alone.

This point of his reflections lost the poignancy it should have possessed in the mind of a lover by a curious sensation that drove his troubles out of his head.

Something was beside him trying to make its presence manifest with some strange effect of an appeal, as if the unseen was demanding help from what was alive.

Though not frightened, Heene felt decidedly startled, and recalled stories of mediums, communications, and so forth.

"Wish I understood," he muttered rather nervously, puzzling over some formula appropriate to the occasion, but the words stuck in his throat. "Perhaps this chap Merch died with something on his mind about this very property——"

No sigh now; almost a sob of eager expectancy. Dick's heart fluttered.

"I'm going to sort this out," he repeated in a half-tone, "only I wish I could see the way to begin."

The old couple responsible for the "looking after" could give no help. They were put there because of their ignorance; the overseer held his position very much for the same reason; the wife knew better than to talk to possible purchasers.

There was gossip unlimited at the post office, which was also a public-house and an "all-sorts" store. Summarized it ran:

"Everybody who goes there feels something queer, though nobody sees anything. But it's to do with a deathbed promise that hasn't been fulfilled, so the doctor says, who saw Stephen Merch at the last. He heard him say to his wife, 'You swear to keep your promise, Loo!' and she said 'Yes.'"

"Then he lay quiet for a bit sinking, until just before the last he said the very same words again—'You swear to keep that promise, Loo! I've never had any luck with the place, and I'll never find rest or peace in my grave till it is put right. You'll do it?' and she said 'Yes' again. Then he died. But what it was

nobody ever knew, because the widow cleared out. Ever since, the same queer feeling comes to all who go over the house, and the property's gone down and down and down.

"No, the doctor never heard any more than that— 'You swear to keep your promise, Loo!' 'Twasn't his business to interfere. He wasn't called in till the last, for Merch wouldn't have a doctor.

"People round here think that Merch didn't get his money by clean hands and the memory preyed on his mind. Nobody knew much about him, save that he struck it rich with a mine. He just bought the run, and spent a mint of money building the house. They say he planned it all by himself, and lived close by, giving directions to the workmen. When it was finished he married and brought his wife, a fine young thing with hair done up like sovereigns piled in a coil.

"But he didn't live long to enjoy it. He's been dead eight year now, and nobody'll live at Engadee, much less buy it."

CHAPTER SEVEN

Nature has her own ideas about her noble men.

At clubs and hotels Raban Heene had the reputation of being close-fisted, for he never paid away a penny more than he owed, and questioned every item in his accounts.

If asked for a subscription he weighed the pros and cons before replying ; often as not he refused to give. Sometimes men made bets on his stinginess.

But there was another side to his character to which those who worked for him bore witness. He never over-paid, yet every living soul connected with his business, either in town or country, received a solid present once a year. Raban Heene called it a *surplus* ; employees called it a *surprise*.

The men with families stood highest in this benefaction ; any one with people depending on him had only to make his case known and help would be given. Once or twice Raban Heene was taken in, but only once or twice—the deceiver was promptly punished. Perhaps that lent colour to the close-fisted theory. Provision was made for the widows of any men who had served him steadily ; the children cared for, schooled, and set up in life. In short, Raban Heene favoured the patriarchal system ; he was as a true father to his people.

He paid out enormous sums in these private charities—which he did not call or consider charities, but justice, such as should be followed by all landowners.

Hospitals and other institutions existing for the benefit of the community received nominal sums ; yet

there were a dozen little missions doing good underneath the welter of city life that were sure of generous aid—on condition that his name was never published. He took a sly chuckling pleasure in intensifying his reputation for stinginess, and kept his left hand in ignorance of the cheques his right hand signed.

His station could not boast much in the way of a house, though the supers, overseers and their families were comfortably accommodated. Barracks and the usual huts served for the hands; in time of pressure many went under canvas. Whatever was good enough for the men was good enough for the master, and Dick was brought up on the same principle.

The town residence of the Heenes was a commodious villa in a seaside suburb with plenty of garden and orchard, though not by any means suggestive of wealth.

Since Mrs. Heene's death the housekeeping had been attended to by her sister, who faithfully carried out instructions about careful expenditure; also, by instruction, she spent several hours a week rummaging out cases of real distress and helping them anonymously.

Curious stories were told about Raban Heene. He was one of those personalities that set stories going of their own volition. Everything he touched turned to stories.

Once he lent his horse to a tramp and walked the twenty miles himself to his destination. A week later he received a dirty post card:

Your hoss is well but i hev kep him a bit lonner til i gets a job.

Heene did not trust everything to his overseers. They never knew when he might turn up. Once he was discovered as a hand working on his own station, watching how matters were progressing. Another time he was engaged as a gardener and compelled to pay half a crown for a rake in place of the one he had broken.

When the job was finished he walked off with the rake to bid for some land that was for sale. The gathering laughed to hear a man with a rake on his shoulder bidding in thousands ; it was not till then his identity dawned upon them.

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Dick was reporting progress about the Engadee property, and the elder Heene ruminated over something in the mists of memory that would not come into the open daylight of his mind.

He was a grey little shadow of a man, frail to look at, but wiry to the degree of youthful strength.

"What I can't understand is that the place should be so like the old home that my dad came from in England—in Southshire. 'Engledree' it was called, not 'Engadee.' He had a picture of it, and for years after his death it was among my things, until one day Tom Diss was talking of going home to England to see his people and I showed him the picture, telling him to run down to Southshire and have a look at the old place, to bring me word what it was like now. I did not mean him to take it away, but he did, and of course I never saw it again, for Tom Diss was one of the most careless fellers living. He didn't go to England, but got messing about with some mine, and I lost sight of him for years at a time. Now here's this Engadee, the very letter of the place."

"Was it a plan ? "

"An architect's drawing. My dad was intended for that before he came out to the gold rush of '51. I can't understand it. This chap Merch who built Engadee might ha' got hold of the picture and had the house built like it. H'm ! Merch ? Merch ? I can't recall any man of that name. There was a Mrs. Merch came bothering me once about a charity bazaar ; but she was little more than a girl, a redheaded, good-looking wench, with the devil's own tongue for getting at the coin."

"When I go to England," said Dick, "I'll hunt up the old place."

"Ay. And if you come across any of the same name as yourself, say that your dad and his dad before him were the offspring of men who worked the soil as well as owned it. Oh, ye had ancestors, lad, though some of 'em were cronk—like their neighbours. Once they built a church for luck, before they set out on a thieving bout. I give you a bank draft. See which bucks you up most."

"I would like to know more of my ancestors," said the younger man.

"Tush! Don't get thinking of your ancestors, lad. Worst thing ye could have. Shunt your ancestors. Think of your descendants. What good's ancestors to our business? Fellers who stole other men's wives and added their names to their own, to call themselves next of kin, and do a little extra thieving on it."

"It might help me in England."

"Not so much as my bank draft. You've got to spend a bit of money in getting our stuff on the market; got to be a whale at advertising. I'm putting £50,000 at your back, and if need be another to follow. I'll stand to lose that fifty thou. without turning a hair. Face the world with a bold heart and shoot all fear of the future. Find out the kind of work you like best and go at it like blazes. That's grit—and *me*."

Dick said nothing of his peculiar experience bordering on the supernatural. His father might have cancelled the trip to England there and then did he suspect his son of the least trend to such fancies.

They discussed the acreage and various aspects of Engadee.

"It's not worth the half of what was spent on it. As it stands now, not even a quarter; but it could be made to pay well. I'll offer three thousand for it."

The elder Heene smiled and shook his head.

"They're not out for philanthropy, lad."

"They can't get anyone to live in the house. Who-

ever buys the land must build a new residence, and the cost of getting material there is enormous. Will you back me up? I mean, while I am away will you keep hammering at the agents? They'll refuse at first and hang out till they find they can get no more; then, perhaps, knock under for another thousand or so."

"Of course I'll stand to you, lad. Only let them understand it's your deal, not mine, and that I've no use for the place. All the same, you can have whatever you want if you can nail them to a cash bargain."

CHAPTER EIGHT

Art is a gaoler with a long chain and a small lantern.

SHORTLY afterwards they separated, Dick to commence negotiations, his father to attend to some private business that showed yet another facet to his curious character.

In a busy part of Melbourne Raban Heene turned down a side street and reconnoitred the exterior of the place which engaged his attention, a small brick building shut in by walls of corrugated iron, and shadowed by larger buildings in the vicinity. The yard was partially roofed over, with ivy swinging amongst the beams, catching, twisting, and intertwining, until it matted into a thick canopy and stretched fresh trails through the windows which were never shut. The place had a lop-sided look that caused Raban Heene to shrug his shoulders as he walked in.

He was aware of its history, how it was well on the road to ruin, when a sculptor, Maurice Darley, got possession for a few pounds and propped it up to suit his requirements.

Darley had received his early art training in Melbourne, subsequently spending several years in Europe, until a craving for the sunshine of his own land brought him back.

The Press made much of him and a few commissions resulted ; but were it not for Raban Heene's friendship Darley would have starved. Periodically Heene packed him off to one of his runs and found him work. Darley

was a good bookkeeper ; it had been his first occupation, and though the office stool was the hardest iron to him, an unfettered existence upcountry was another matter.

The studio suggested eccentricity as much as art, for the ivy was trained through it on a rope, and any little sporting tendril encouraged to enter. One has only to hold up a finger of welcome to ivy to be sure it makes itself at home. The ivy in the studio appeared in every nook and corner.

“ He’ll get ivy on the brain,” muttered Heene disapprovingly as he peered in the window. “ Perhaps he has it now.”

The blinds were faded and worn ; there was little in the way of furniture apart from the studio accessories. In the centre stood a pedestal with a marble bust, the likeness of a great man who had died, and whose memory was to be perpetuated a little while among the things he had loved ; the face staring forward, not into futurity, but into the actual world of the men who had once gathered round him—a great white thing to honour a funeral feast, yet the only lifelike object in the room where all else seemed dead except the encroaching ivy, slow-growing, sure as Nemesis.

Even the sculptor’s heart was dead as he sat there dreaming, an old-young man with weary eyes. Life was too hard for him. He looked at the ivy, wondering how long it might take before it would overgrow the place ; bury him, the marble bust, all record of the hopes and fears of one poor human heart that ached for fame, and found itself famished.

Raban Heene, still peering, saw something that made him square his jaw. The sculptor’s hand went to his pocket ; he took out a little phial as if to swallow its contents, hesitated, sighed and replaced it, sitting so still that a mouse took courage to emerge from a crevice, glance at the man and the white image as if already familiar with them, then run along the floor in quest of food.

"All that plotting and planning for a crumb of bread," thought the sculptor. "All my plotting and planning for—what? Not even a crumb." He took out the phial once more.

Raban Heene knocked sharply at the door and without waiting for a reply walked in.

The sculptor had risen with a start, but the annoyance faded from his eyes as he recognized his visitor.

"I've a job for you," began Heene unceremoniously. "It must be done at once, right-away. Can you fix up a little medallion in marble—copy it from a photograph, I mean?"

"A portrait? Yes."

"Right. How long? To-morrow?"

Maurice Darley smiled in spite of his depression.

"Scarcely. Give me a bit longer. What is it?"

"This." Heene took an old-fashioned photograph from his pocket-book. "That's my mother. I want a medallion of her. Just like she looks there, sweet and tender and true, not a beauty, not even pretty, but *my mother*."

"I'll do my best," said Darley, touched by the other's earnestness.

"Yes, your best; not your level best, but the best that God Almighty put in you when he gave you talent. It isn't for myself; my memory needs no jogging, but for my lad. He's going home soon, and I want him to have a picture of his little grandmother in marble. It'll look more like her than a photograph; it will be white like she was, fair and pure, what my old dad called her—a wee white blossom of the English snow."

"It shall be done."

"The price is just whatever you like to ask because I'm hurrying you up. You may as well have a bit on account."

Darley flushed, as if to refuse; but Heene held out a ten-pound note.

"Don't stand on ceremony with me, lad. We can

all do with a bit on account. Mind you get that portrait into marble—a wee white blossom of the English snow.”

“The words will help me to realize it.”

“What’s that thing under the cloth?”

Without waiting for a reply Heene began to examine the object—a plaster cast, showing the same face as the marble bust, but placid, soft, untroubled.

“It is the death mask. I took it a few hours after he died. We were such friends that I keep it for myself. The other, as you know, is a subscription bust for presentation to the Public Library. It seems strange that he who loved life and did so much for science should only live now in marble, while I, who would willingly be out of it, remain.”

“It’s that darned ivy. I knew it would get hold of you. Tear the bally thing down if it’s going to claw you like that. I looked through the window and *saw*. Give me that bottle, lad. Give it me, I say.”

“I’ll destroy it, I promise.”

“I’ll do it for you. Come.”

Finding the searching gaze too much, Darley took the phial from his pocket. The next moment Heene had snatched it, stamped it under his feet, grinding the glass into the cement of the studio floor.

“That’s O.K. Now tell me what’s given you the blue devils.”

“Oh, the same old story—lack of appreciation, no commissions; not the fault of the people but the place, not enough to go round. The money I got for that bust has squared up my debts—but the future?”

“Would you do any better if you went home?”

Darley’s face lit up.

“Yes. There’s everything that’s lacking here.”

“I don’t believe it. But you shall have your chance. I’ll send you home with my boy.”

“I can’t take it from you—it is too much.”

“Reckon on it and make your plans. Don’t thank me, I don’t want thanks; I want to see you on your

feet, for there's stuff in you. You shall go with Dick."

"First saloon? Oh, no, the cheapest line is quite good enough——"

"Rot! You shall go with Dick, and perhaps on the way you'll be able to pick up a commission or two from any swells on board. Even if they don't ante-up, get in with 'em, get in with 'em."

Darley grasped Heene's hand, a hard thin hand with iron in the fingers—or was it gold?

"You shall never regret it. I'll justify your belief in me."

"Good! Go ahead. But what I never can understand is why your sister, Mrs. Ireton, doesn't help you."

"I never go there; I never ask her. She sneered at my choice of a profession when she saw there was nothing in it—money, I mean—and her words stung me. In spite of all their show and style they haven't a penny to bless themselves with."

"What? The Iretons haven't?"

"It's true. Nora's talked of as an heiress, and some swell's taking her home to train her for a title. That'll about bust them up."

"H'm. And my boy's in love with their girl. H'm. Down in the mouth too; I fancy she's refused him. H'm. And not a penny to bless themselves with. Well, 'tisn't the first time beetles have passed themselves off as butterflies. Yet I like Jo Ireton; he's a good sort."

CHAPTER NINE

The man who discovers a new foodstuff or a new fibre is a pioneer of freedom.

THE particular business that was taking Richard Heene to England was a new industry that promised to come into prominence in the near future, though it was as yet in its swaddling clothes.

Two years previously a chance discovery had brought to light the use that could be made of a peculiar fibre growing along the southern sea-coasts.

It was coarse and rough, yet of such extraordinary strength that no amount of tugging could break the strands, which bore a resemblance on a gigantic scale to the hairy covering of a coconut. Locally, so far as there was any local interest manifested, it was known as sea flax or marine fibre ; but nobody gave it a thought until chance stepped in. Even then years passed before it was reckoned a commercial asset.

The business of treating the samples was child's play to the giant's task of getting the fibre in large quantities.

After securing a concession from the Government for the tracts chosen on the southern coast, and floating a company, special machinery had to be evolved from experience gained by the daily needs of washing sand and shell from the fibre ; the old makeshift pontoon dredge had to be replaced by a modern steam dredger built in Holland. England was ransacked for a suitable dredger without success. Holland, with the

perpetual dredging of harbours and canals, knew better how to build such boats.

All this necessitated so much time and money that people shook their heads and prophesied failure.

Raban Heene did not allow such a cloud to overshadow him ; he went steadily ahead, determined on achieving success in the end. Markets had to be created. It was an uphill fight to get the fibre treated in the ordinary trade fashion.

Buyers did not understand its nature—how far it would be affected by the voyage to England, in weight, texture, and condition ; whether it could be regularly supplied in quantity to a standard grade.

Raban Heene sent several consignments to his London agent, impressing on him the importance of this new material and its immense possibilities.

The London agent for Heene Limited signed himself with a flourish " M. Amington Swan," and invariably commenced his communications with a cheerful cataloguing of his doings :

" I have great pleasure in stating that I have succeeded in inducing Blank & Co. to stock samples of the fibre," or " I am happy to be in a position to announce that Dash & Co. have definitely promised, etc."

Correspondence of this kind is intended to give the impression that the writer is moving heaven and earth, certainly working day and night, to bring the dilatory Dash up to the scratch, or to induce the obdurate Blank to change his mind. The London business world is flooded with the fantasies of Amington Swans without any real result.

Swan, as the easiest way to himself of dealing with the fibre, just put it into the hands of a selling broker to find a buyer. The broker, possessed of the same labour-saving idea, offered the stuff at auction. There is always someone in an auction-room looking for bargains, nosing round for new stuff.

Auctions offering indifferent and irregular results, Raban Heene decided to stop consignments and only make c.i.f.e. sales. Notwithstanding many protests that it was impossible to find buyers other than through the auction-room, Amington Swan was driven out, much against his will, to find buyers on these new terms.

To establish a steady market Raban Heene made many concessions, even to extending the terms to cash against documents on arrival of a ship with goods instead of payment upon presentation of documents as is customary in c.i.f.e. transactions.

The fight would have killed a weaker man. Some new concession was always wanted; dissatisfaction was expressed with every lot; discouragement on all sides rather than helpfulness. This rag-tag product of an Antipodean beach must be snubbed to humility.

Arbitration was worked to the limit, buyers planking down their fees only to lose their cases time and again, whilst Amington Swan was fatuously urging a return to consigning to the auctions.

Raban Heene never got flustered or put out. This imperturbability he impressed on all who worked for him. As the head of a company most of the business troubles gravitated to him to straighten out, as chicks to a protecting wing. Though he was wideawake as to the l.s.d. result, he bracketed that with the permanent satisfaction of the buyer.

He had tackled other commodities besides the fibre; his ideas created frank laughter at first, yet they were eventually accepted; a new style of sale evolved and made workable.

Shrewd-headed, patient, strenuous that he was, Raban Heene grew weary of his London agent. He searched his sales for an answering rise only to find that whatever was being done was through his own brain.

His experience was not uncommon. Many a business man at the Antipodes has been barred on a promising

road by the Amington Swan limpets who cling to positions in London.

The head of Heene Limited put down his foot.

"They say it takes three years to capture the English market," he said to his son. "At this rate it will take three hundred. You go home and pay off that ass. Get ready at once."

By this time, as the result of Raban Heene's incessant work, the Australian firm was strong enough to set up a branch in London, and other centres if necessary.

Hagglers could now be treated with indifference. This take-it-or-leave-it principle can only be carried through by business men of the first aptitude and backed by wealth.

Thenceforward progress was steady, though at a snail's pace, until Dick Heene went "home" to woo the London market, just in time to get ahead of the war.

Heene Limited had commenced negotiations abroad, but no large orders followed. The English trade seemed the most likely; several firms were stocking samples; the trade journals published "pre-pars," on the usual understanding that advertisements would follow.

One big man was watching the fibre from the moment it appeared on the market. He saw something behind the welter and gave himself a trip to the New Thing's home, watching what was being done with a thin-lipped smile. It ended by his becoming a large shareholder. Not before he had carried on considerable juggling on his own account though. For this big man, Bagwell King, was a "factor," neither wholesale merchant nor manufacturer, yet possessing great influence and controlling many interests.

Bagwell King was noted for his cool, keen eye on the manufacturing market. He understood the English lethargy; he came into being because of it; he traded on it. It was his habit to watch for anything new,

secure all the bargains he could snap up and sell at a huge profit.

He had made a cosy corner in the mercantile world that brought sellers buzzing round like flies. Bagwell King was as much a type as Amington Swan, with this difference, that the factor was as keen as the agent was callow.

It may be that the Bagwell Kings breed the Amington Swans for business purposes.

The smaller English manufacturer seldom knows his raw material market ; where the stuff comes from, how much it really costs first hand, he does not trouble to find out. Of the ultimate market of his product, where it goes, or what price the user pays, he has not the faintest idea. All this is left to the "go-between," the factor.

Given a shrewd head, some capital, a convincing manner, added to a capacity for incessant vigilance, factoring as a get-rich-quick business has no rival.

It lies between the limits of not killing the goose that lays the golden eggs while keeping the poor devil of a goose in view of its possible funeral.

Bagwell King's methods were simplicity itself. He amassed a fortune by them.

He magnified to the seller of the raw material the difficulty of finding a manufacturer to take it on ; to the manufacturer he magnified the difficulty of getting supplies because of bad seasons, defective transport facilities, the increasing effort necessary to sell the finished goods.

Thus he bought the raw material to sell to small manufacturers, occasionally financing them ; finally delivering the finished article into the next distributing channel, piling up the profit at each stage of the transaction.

When, therefore, the marine fibre was put on the London market Bagwell King was as naturally attracted

to it as a dog to a bone. With the dilatory Amington Swan tinkering around the auction sales, the factor jumped at his chance and made several satisfactory deals.

It was to his interest to keep up the dissatisfaction and encourage trouble over consignments.

This might have continued indefinitely were it not that a shrewder brain than the factor's was pulling the wires at the other end. Raban Heene soon became familiar with Bagwell King's methods and brought the game of shuttlecock with prices to a summary end by stopping consignments to auctions, and driving the precious Amington Swan to find buyers on c.i.f.e. terms.

To his infinite discomfort the London agent was compelled to bestir himself, all the time protesting that the c.i.f.e. system was wrong, utterly wrong, as the incessant claims showed.

When Raban Heene determined to open his own selling office in London, and commenced negotiations with big men to manufacture the product, Bagwell King woke up to the fact that while he and Swan were playing with what they thought a soft thing, the Australian end was growing in strength. The factor got a fright. He saw he must stand in with the Australians or be out for good.

That was the point where he became a shareholder.

CHAPTER TEN

A man with a will and a man with a way
Are a quagmire of talk and the devil to pay.

THOUGH Dick Heene received short notice for the momentous trip to England, he was that type of Australian to step on board ship there and then, and travel to the end of the world just to look over the wall.

His departure was delayed owing to a temporary set-back through a loss by fire that broke out in the shed where the fibre was stored for treatment, pressing, packing and baling. Considerable damage was done, but this was covered by insurance.

The company sent an official known as an "adjuster" to assess the loss and make a settlement. Dick received him, glad of the chance to attest his business acumen.

The accounts were ready and won a compliment from the visitor that he had never seen a better or a clearer statement of affairs. The claim was for £5,623 7s. 10d. The adjuster suavely suggested that, as it looked better to deal in even money, the odd £3 7s. 10d. be knocked off.

Dick demurred.

"Why should I? Here are the accounts and I am standing behind them."

"Oh, but it looks so much better to deal in pounds. Odd shillings and pence have a sordid appearance."

It was a small matter. Dick yielded.

"As you please. When can I expect a cheque for the £5,620?"

The adjuster looked alarmed.

"Oh, my dear sir, we are by no means paying any such amount. We haven't settled the details. I'll pass your stock losses, but the machinery is another matter."

"The machinery is *the* matter."

"Yes, but it's been in use some time. It's all very well for you to set down cost, but that's *first* cost remember, and therefore first value. After some years of use it cannot be the same. You must admit that."

"I don't admit anything of the sort. They were insured for the sum claimed; they were maintained in perfect working order up to the time of loss; they were doing the work well, and you took the premiums on them."

"Yes, yes, granted. But the conditions of the policy are that the company undertakes—and willingly undertakes, let me tell you—to put you in the same position as before the fire. That is all. You cannot expect new machines."

"H'm. That's your attitude, is it?"

"Yes. To put you on the same footing as before the loss."

"I'm content if you do that. Give me my engine and my machinery at work to-morrow morning at nine o'clock, that's all I ask."

"Oh, come now; you know I can't give you the engine or machinery by that time."

"Why can't you?"

"Because I don't know where to get them."

"Well, I'll give you a week. I don't want money; I want machinery."

"I can't give machinery because I can't get it. But we are willing to pay the price of——"

"Why do you talk of price if you can't get the machinery? It's the machinery I want at work to-morrow morning. I could have told you at first that you can't get the machinery here, because I have

already been trying everywhere for something that will do, some sort of substitute ; but there is nothing. I was the inventor of part of the mechanism and several improvements. They were executed to my order, and, of course, you can't get them. It's money in full—or machinery."

"We'll replace with good second-hand stuff ; but I'll not authorize any more money than I offer."

"No use. Replace completely or pay in full."

"I'll not do any more."

"All right. I'll take you to the Supreme Court inside a week."

"Oh, Mr. Heene, wait a minute. I'll see the company's manager about it."

"No use. Machines in full or money in full—or the Supreme Court."

"Wait, wait ! Let it stand till to-morrow. I'll send the company's manager."

"Good day ! See you in the Supreme Court."

The company's manager appeared glum and reproachful of visage.

"Say, Mr. Heene, what's this ? Our adjuster says you'll not settle the claim, and threaten a lawsuit. We mustn't have anything like that."

"Well, pay up, and don't fool round. I'm standing behind my claim. I'm not making any bargain. It's your adjuster who's doing that. So take your precious bargain-maker and drown him. Pay up or go to Court."

"Oh, it's all right ; we'll pay, we'll pay."

"Yes, you will pay, and you'll pay something more. Just come in from the fire brigade is an account for services rendered for putting out the fire, £87."

"That's your business."

"No, it's yours. Your bargain-maker said you would willingly put us back in the same position as before the fire ; but was not called on to do more than that under the policy—don't forget that. We were a going concern without that liability before the fire. The brigade

account is a liability caused by the fire, a consequence of the fire, and your own bargain-maker admits that he cannot get away from a consequence of the fire—so you will pay that, too. I might have passed it but for his attitude ; now I'm going to have every blessed penny up to our rights."

This little comedy of commerce ended next day with the arrival of Mr. Bargain-Maker with the necessary papers. He was spruce and serene as usual, even to nonchalance.

"The company's manager has authorized me to accept your statement of loss, Mr. Heene ; but there is one little thing we want you to do—to sign the papers in an amended form. We must let the machinery stand for claim as certified to by our engineer ; but to overcome that little difficulty we have added the difference to your stock sheets for the higher amount."

"You want my signature to a lie ? "

"If you care to put it that way."

"Oh, well, anything to get rid of you ; but it's not right, and you know it isn't."

"Yes, we have to do things now and then that are—um—a trifle irregular, perhaps, to keep going ; but I don't suppose we are any worse than the average."

"I only want my money. You would not pay it unless it were fully due—call it what you like."

The elder Heene nodded approvingly when the matter was thus satisfactorily disposed of.

"I couldn't have done better myself, lad."

Thus Dick stepped into the full responsibility of partnership.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

The dingo and the kangaroo
Learnt little tricks together,
The magpie mocked and screamed " Hurroo ! "
The possum held the tether.

NORA DISS chose an unusual way of bidding farewell to her friends. Amidst the delight of preparing for departure there was one keen regret. She must leave her pets, a small collection of animals she had trained.

The ordinary " At Home " day, as prescribed in society calendars, was a dreary, meaningless affair to her. She hit on a novel idea of giving performances by her amateur menagerie in aid of various charities.

Invitations were distributed :

Little Noah's Ark Limited.

At Home.

NORA DISS, Trainer.

The Launching Place.

Collection in aid of (named) Charity.

Little Noah's Ark Limited always attracted a crowd. The At Home was held on a capacious lawn with plenty of seats and a refreshment tent. People arrived from all parts of the district, even so far as twenty miles away, in motors, on horseback, bicycles, buck-board buggies, spring carts, anyhow, friends bringing friends in the Australian fashion, with other friends in the rear,

and yet again further removed, laughingly likening themselves to

The little fleas with lesser fleas
And so *ad infinitum*.

A representative of the charity to be benefited, generally a hospital, was in attendance, near a canvas stretched on four poles and allowed to sag in the middle, for the reception of whatever coins the guests liked to throw in. This was in itself an item of amusement, as great delight was taken in seeing who could throw farthest. A penny was the best coin missile, but as pennies were considered mean, half-crowns were in general use. Now and again a sovereign shot through the air, and nuggets were not unknown.

As Lady Rose Allway expressed a wish to see Little Noah's Ark Limited, Nora arranged a performance, though rather chastened in spirit to think it would be the last for many months to come, perhaps for ever if—she could not help thinking of that “if.” Fairyland is not without taxation.

The programme opened with a general march round of the animals to the skirling of genuine bagpipes by an old Scotsman on the estate.

Nora Diss, in a uniform of navy linen and white, with a gold-buttoned cap, marshalled her pets with a long white wand tipped with a cluster of little tinkling bells.

The animals were almost as keen as the audience, and took manifest delight in the applause. They were all young, in perfect condition ; carefully, though not over fed.

A couple of kangaroos, a group of native companions, a native bear, an opossum, a cockatoo, a magpie, and a dingo fraternized with more civilized pets and an infantile tiger cat.

The kangaroos wrestled and made friends, tried their queer paws at boxing and took long leaps at command, hopping back to their mistress for petting, clearly

anxious to keep on. When finally made to understand that their turn was over, and no encores allowed, they sprang over a fence and bounded out of sight.

Then the native companions danced a quadrille, or as near as they could get to it, with stiff, jerky motions and solemnly staring eyes that suggested the desolation of vast plains in the interior.

The "possum" coiled itself around a branch fixed for its benefit, and uncoiled itself, pretended to go to sleep, and awoke at the shrill note of a whistle.

Musical items were contributed by the magpie, who whistled coster refrains and "Polly put the kettle on," as a hospitable hint to the refreshment tent; while the cockatoo was coaxed into considerable speech by lumps of sugar. Shy at first, he found his tongue too much and kept up a fire of interjections throughout the performance.

The domestic dogs leapt through hoops and carried begging baskets amongst the audience; a wondering-eyed little pony, with a coat like grey velvet, allowed the other animals to scramble on his back, and trotted up and down with them while the monkey gravely rewarded him with biscuits.

The native bear was too stupid to learn anything except to sit still in a doll's perambulator, the odd whitey-grey blankness of its face giving it an unalive look. It might have been either awake or asleep for all the unblinking shapelessness of its eyes showed.

"Did you ever see such a fool?" shrieked the cockatoo, and the magpie whistled "Baby wants the moon."

The dingo, diverted from his evil ways because of his infancy, took his place in a small cart with the monkey as driver and the baby tiger cat as fare. Wickedness seemed the last thing in their minds. If ever there was a trio free from original sin and innocent in a world of guile it was the monkey, dingo, and tiger kitten.

Yet when the conversational cockatoo advanced too

near the equipage with a raucous "Does your mother know you're out?" the tiger spirit leapt to life and a baby claw shot at the bird's sulphur crest.

"I'll pay you out!" shrieked the cockatoo, hopping aside and imitating the cat's spitting so successfully that she sprang after him in fury. An unrehearsed item came into effect, for the dingo, under some impression of guardianship, dashed after the fare, with the monkey driver going through a frantic pantomime of pulling up.

Nobody was ever tired of the entertainment. This last afternoon, with the ring of farewell echoing in every speech, gave it an impetus that reached a climax of cheering at the close. The guests, friends, spectators, whatever they liked to call themselves, burst into "Auld Lang Syne," at first in a diversity of keys and pitches, but the majority swamping the rest by aid of the skirling bagpipes. It set Little Noah's Ark Limited frolicking on its own account, but when some stentorian lungs shouted "Speech! Speech!" Nora Diss broke down and wept.

The pony was the first to notice her distress. He went up with a gentle pawing of the ground, lowering his pretty grey velvet nose until it snuggled into her hands. The domestic dogs ran to her whimpering, not knowing what to make of such an unusual occurrence, for she had trained them by kindness and rewards.

One of the kangaroos, more intelligent than its mate, leapt forward, nestling against her waist and pushing its head under her arm, for these creatures are the most affectionate of pets if reared from the mother's pouch.

The more emotional of the onlookers began to weep in sympathy, until the cockatoo put pathos to the rout by shrieking "I'm full of this! Give it a rest!"

The laughter helped Nora to recover, but speech was beyond her. Her self-confidence was gone.

Friends crowded round her to shake hands, kiss her,

caress her, until the menagerie was in danger of being smothered.

“Come back soon!” cried every voice. In the delight of being loved and lionized Nora forgot fairyland for a little while. Nothing in all the world could give her this moment again.

CHAPTER TWELVE

How many friendships have been originated by tobacco ?

THE R.M.S. *Luna* was in the Indian Ocean before the passengers began to sort themselves out. To Dick Heene's chagrin Nora Diss was not on board, although her name was on the passenger list, and he had manœuvred to be a fellow-traveller. She could not be ready in time, it was said. Though entertaining a suspicion of other forces at work, he was ignorant that the vigilant Lady Rose was bent on circumventing any love-making save such as met her approval.

The disappointment subdued him for a little, especially as the idleness of board o' ship life left so much time for moody thought.

But he was young, and the persistent way new interests are forced into activity on a long voyage swept him into the general bustle. In a week he, too, was racing round the deck with a potato on a spoon, drawing up a sports programme, fielding in a game of cricket at 100° in the shade of the awnings, doing the regulation mile after meals, and other usual kill-time complexities. Youth has always the power to set Dame Fancy in a cap and apron and make a decent housemaid of her.

Amongst his fellow-passengers was a stalwart little red-haired man, not much over five feet high, with a wife so like himself in form and feature that she might have been his twin sister.

Their speech placed them down the social scale, and Heene summed them up as retired tradespeople on a

holiday. Ignored by many and snubbed by not a few, the pair bore slights and sneers with the utmost good-humour.

"Lots o' folk has dooks for fathers on board this boat," the wife smilingly observed to Heene, who always gave her "Good morning." "Wunner they don't run a line of their own."

The same remark was on his tongue, but he felt it scarcely tactful to utter.

He was curious as to the couple's identity, especially as two or three leading men on board treated the husband with a civility as marked as the incivility of the more snobbish. He asked the chief steward who they were.

"That's the Mayor of Locker Gully."

"And who might he be?"

"It was in the papers a few years back how a man named Torridge kept the local bank from shutting its doors by taking a bag of gold there, and telling the crowd there was no need for alarm, and that he would give an I.O.U. to anyone who wanted his money out. This is the same man—Torridge. Princetown was the name of the place at the time, but they changed it back to the name it had in the old days, for after lying worked out for nearly fifty years they have struck a new mine. He's always doing something. A gang of bushrangers tried to hold up the post office, and there was Torridge again with a revolver in each hand—he can use both. They scooted. Some chap went off his head and started to run amok with a knife. Torridge again, with a bucket of water. Nobody else thought of it. Then a tiger got out of a circus—oh, they do see life at Locker Gully—and off started the Mayor in pursuit, with half the town at his horse's heels. The tiger was so scared with the row that it trotted back to the circus. Of course they had fever and smallpox there—it's the sort of town that gets everything—and the Mayor and his wife were vaccinated. He's built a

hospital, or a town hall, I forget which ; done a heap more things than I can remember, and made a mint of money over this mine which he discovered. His fellow townies think he's just it, and year after year he's elected mayor. Nobody else'll stand. He's king and she is queen—a real good sort she is, though the swells look down on her."

It was easy to see that the section of first-class passengers who regarded themselves as the Lord's anointed ignored the Mayor of Locker Gully and his wife ; but there were some who liked the downright honesty of the pair and admired their understanding of themselves.

Snobbishness on a liner comes out naked and unashamed ; the longer the voyage the greater the chance for nature to wear through the veneer ; or perhaps the veneer gets burnt off in the tropics and lays bare the raw material.

As the voyage continued and new diversions were welcomed, Torridge started the smoking saloon off with a conundrum that became a stock entertainment.

"What was the silliest deal you ever did for yourself?"

The humorous confession involved proved contagious ; it set men ransacking their memories to add another laugh to what the stories engendered, and incidentally supply illuminating sidelights on the growing history of a young country.

Dick Heene was not behindhand.

"I began as a bank clerk," he said, "because my dad wanted me to understand business from all sides. My first boss was a man who afterwards put in four years for embezzlement and his accountant for three. Between them they wrecked the bank. I was at Copperton when it happened. We had a small branch twenty-five miles out, back country, and no telegraph line. About 11 a.m. our manager told me to get a trap and go out to this branch manager and close him up. I had never been there ; the livery stable people said their man

knew the way and would drive me out. He lost the track, however, and didn't get there till after 3 p.m., instead of a couple of hours earlier. This bank always kept a lot of cash, for it was a lively little place with the copper discoveries. But before I reached it the bank was cleaned out of cash and other banks' notes. The manager couldn't understand why so many chaps wanted their cheques cashed all at once. He knew later. So did I. It was a faked job for my man to lose his way driving me, so as to give time for the news to get to the branch and so put the fellows up to getting their cash. Our manager ramped round, but afterwards I wasn't sorry. Those hardworking chaps deserved their bit of money instead of being swindled out of it."

"The silliest deal I ever did for myself," said Torridge, "was when I tried my hand at a tannery. I kept the volunteer reel on the premises so that in any outbreak of fire I could pump the tan liquor out of the pits to any blaze in the building. Tan liquor, you know, or any thick liquor, even beer, is better than water in putting out a fire. I was a good deal younger then, and had a bee in my bonnet. Well, one day a big fire broke out in the place next door and spread to the tannery. I toiled and sweated and cursed my luck for hours, for I thought I was much under insured. When I'd got the fire under I found out my clerk had amply covered the whole show by insurance a week before, and never told me. It crumpled me up so that I hadn't another kick left in me."

It was stories like these that were the delight of the smoking saloon. Every odd shift and turn of life had brought something to the Mayor of Locker Gully. Though it would be hard to find a kinder-hearted man; not in that whole ship's company was there a shrewder head.

There was always some unexpected point in his stories that set people thinking. The laugh was a secondary

matter. Once the talk settled on letters of introduction and their lack of value.

"I used to do business with an Argentine man," said Torridge. "He was a half-breed, Italian and Irish mixture, more alive than either nation if left to itself. When he was in the Argentine he carried on business with a London agent, and like lots of other Anglo-foreign firms they were bothered with the letter of introduction nuisance. English folk are great on getting rid of their cronks, keen on shooting them abroad. The London agent couldn't say 'No,' and used to send out Johnnies by the score. The Argentine chap got fed up and fixed a little idea of his own. The letter of intro. was of the usual kind, but there were three different styles of it. A clean sheet without spots or smudges meant 'Treat the youngster well, and give him a shove along if he has it in him.' A careless-looking black blot or smudge, as if from an inky finger in the left-hand corner of the letter, meant 'No need to do overmuch; let the boy go after a little while.' But number three was the corker. It had a small red dot near the date as if a red ink pen had been taken up by mistake and put aside at once. It meant 'Kill off the D.F. as quickly as possible.' And," added Torridge earnestly, "it was managed every time!"

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

If forgotten gold mines could give up their secrets the whole world would need remodelling.

" SAY, are you the chap mentioned here? " Torridge called to Dick Heene, and pointing to a paragraph in an old newspaper.

Mr. Richard Heene, son of Mr. Raban Heene, is among the likely purchasers of the Engadee Estate.

" The purchase hasn't been effected yet," replied Heene. Torridge looked at him knowingly.

" And it won't be if you have any savvy."

" Why? "

" Cos you'd be buying a lawsuit. Engadee's no more belonging to the widow of Steve Merch or even Merch himself than it belongs to me."

" To whom, then? "

The smile that accompanied the question tended to pique Torridge, as suggesting his information was more humorous than useful.

" I suppose Merch's name appears in all the deeds and papers—nobody's but Merch's? "

" Quite so. Nobody's name but Merch's," assented Dick.

" Then take it from me that it's a darned swindle from beginning to end."

" You speak strongly."

" I'd speak stronger to save a man buying trouble for

himself. What's more, I'll say it in the witness-box. That satisfy you ? ”

There was something unusual in his earnestness that stirred Dick.

“ I'm not doubting your word in the least. I'm only wondering how you got your information, seeing no one else has heard of it.”

“ Cos I knew Merch afore he built Engadee. I knew him afore he was rich—afore he fell in with Tom Diss.”

Dick Heene started.

“ What had Tom Diss to do with it ? ”

“ Everything. Engadee was built with Tom Diss's money. Merch and Diss were partners. Didn't you know ? ”

“ This is the first I've heard of it. Partners in what ? ”

“ In a mine. They got wind of a spot with the usual signs of promise ; fixed up possession without a word to anyone. But the old story : couldn't do a ha'porth of good with it after sinking some hundreds. So they turned it up. Then Tom Diss died ; but after a few years Merch got to work again on the same spot, and struck it rich. That's how he came to build Engadee—with Tom Diss's money.”

“ But if the partnership ended, how could it be Tom Diss's money ? ”

“ Because the partnership was not ended in any legal sense. They both had enough of the mine and let things drift. Oh, there was no row ; they just let things drift—cried ‘ quits,’ and went their different ways. I don't believe they ever saw each other again ; but that doesn't alter the financial issue when the mine turned out trumps.”

“ But how d'you know all this ? What's your authority ? ”

“ Bless ye, boy ! I knew the two of 'em. Diss was one of those good-hearted chaps that hate the bother of

signing their own names even ; Merch was just the opposite. I don't suppose he would cheat anyone. He was straightgoing enough, and if Diss had been alive probably he'd have got his share ; but Diss was dead some years before the mine began to boom—what more natural than the surviving partner should collar the swag ? ”

“ You think he built Engadee with Diss's money without making restitution to the widow ? ”

“ I'm jolly well sure of it.”

“ But that's fraud.”

“ It is. So you see what I mean by buying a lawsuit. Tom Diss's heirs or executors have only to say such a sale is invalid and the purchaser will find himself in Queer Street. I've never seen the place and forgot all about it till I read this paragraph, when it struck me I might have more knowledge than you and save you losing your money.”

“ I feel very much obliged to you. I'll cable my father at once. May I ? ”

“ I'll stand by what I've said. It isn't the first time I've said it either. Once or twice the Engadee property cropped up and I put in a word of warning, as I do now. It's nothing to do with me ; but I hate to see a man lose his money.”

“ Why don't you write to the agents ? ”

Torridge burst into a chuckle.

“ If I wrote to all property agents concerning shady land transactions that have come to my knowledge I'd not have time to earn my own living. But I'm never afraid to speak out, and what's more, never back out of what I've said. Use my name if you like, I can't speak plainer.”

“ I will use your name. I'll—yes, I'll write to Mrs. Ireton at once, the widow of Tom Diss. If what you say is true, the real owner—or at any rate, part owner—is Nora Diss.”

“ I don't know anything of the Diss family ; but if

he left children the sooner they get making inquiries the better."

"What's the name of the mine?"

"The Leather Pocket' now, but twenty-five years ago it was 'The Glory Hole.' They used to say it was a hole without the glory. Here's something to show how easygoing Tom Diss was. He sold a bull once, a real topnotcher, but an outlaw. Stevens, who bought him, had a friend named Clark. One day they met. 'Clark,' says Stevens, 'I've got a bull I'd like to swop. Had him too long; know of anyone who wants him?' 'I'd swop him if he wasn't too old,' says Clark. 'Mine's as quiet as a sheep; what's yours like?' 'Oh, mine will follow me like a dawg,' says Stevens. So they swopped, and each was satisfied he'd got the better of the other. But presently Tom Diss comes along, and I'm bothered if Clark didn't sell Diss back his own bull! Now, is that the kind of man to make money?"

Heene's mind was running on his visit to Engadee, the mysterious suggestion of some unseen presence, the gossip of Camper's Well.

"What sort of a man was Merch? I mean was he the kind of man to try to make restitution even at the eleventh hour?"

"That's the guess I made of him—straight enough, but himself first always. When he saw a chance of grabbing, he grabbed. Diss was dead. Nobody to say 'Yea' or 'Nay.' Tisn't the first case of its kind by a long chalk. But mark me, what was straight in Merch would come out top in the end, even on his death-bed. How'd his will stand?"

"I never saw the will. All I know is that Mrs. Merch is the owner of Engadee; the agents have it fair and square. Every deed and document is to be submitted to the solicitors of the purchaser. That sounds clear enough."

"I don't trust *her*," said Torridge, narrowing his brows as if to recall a memory.

"Mrs. Merch?"

"Ay. I saw her two or three times. She was a circus rider. Not one of the ornary kind; she went to it out of sheer devilment. Her father was a horse dealer in Gippsland, decent folk, and this gal—Looena Lee—had a craze for racing. Once she togged up as a jockey and won a steeplechase. She could ride a horse standing, barebacked, anyhow, even blindfold, and finally ran off with a circus. Fellers went off their heads over her; for she was as fine a thing as ever stepped, with hair the colour of a sovereign. Lord knows what sort of a wife she made. I dessay Merch had a lively time of it; but one thing I could bet my boots on—even if he made a try for restitution, she wasn't the kind to let it come off. Not she! Probably she married him for his money, and it wasn't likely she would stand out to let anyone else come in."

"She did not stay long at Engadee after her husband's death, but took the best of the furniture away and lived in Melbourne for awhile, then sold off and went to England after raising a mortgage on Engadee."

"Who were the mortgagees?"

"The agents."

Torridge laughed.

"You mark my words—she'll get as much as ever she can out of the estate, and let it go hang. Then if anything comes to light, she's safe. You can't bring a wild cat like that to book."

"She must have settled down after her marriage, as no one has anything to say of her. Indeed, she seems to have got into some sort of society."

"Sick of the circus, perhaps. And now gone to the old country to see what she can pick up there. She's clever, too. She could throw a boomerang better than a black; she learnt the trick from them. The time I saw her at the circus her turn was to throw two boomerangs at once different ways, and get 'em both back. Sometimes she smashed slates with 'em. If war broke

out they ought to send her, for she would be as good as a Maxim gun."

Torrige gave this startling description with a measure of pride. Heene thought of the picture in the billiard-room at Engadee, and remembered his aversion. Naturally the question resolved itself—Was this the kind of woman to follow out a dead man's wishes, supposing that he tried to atone for his dishonesty?

"Now I come to think of it," continued Torridge, "isn't there some trouble about keeping Engadee let? I've heard some yarn about the place being haunted."

For a moment Dick felt inclined to speak of his experiences, but felt sensitive about making such a matter public.

"It's easy to set a yarn going to disparage a property."

"Yes; but who sets a yarn going in the first place? There's no smoke without fire; I've seen too many curious things to say 'this or that can't be.' If any place is haunted, Engadee ought to be, seeing it was built with another man's money. Probably Tom Diss is as lazy as a ghost as he was in life, otherwise he would make some stir to get his own back for the sake of his family."

"Oddly enough I heard some gossip at Camper's Well that bears out what you say. Putting two and two together doesn't always make four, and this is beyond me; but it's enough for legal inquiry."

Dick went on to describe Engadee and the neighbourhood. Torridge nodded several times as he listened.

"Some men wait a lifetime to pay back what they owe," he said in a low earnest voice. "Others have to wait till they're dead to get the chance. Look at me, youngster. What d'you think I'm going to do when I set foot in England?"

The question was so direct that Heene stared in

surprise and floundered out a reply about "family affairs."

"Not a bit; I've got no near relations. I'm going to find out a man I owe a hammering to, for the lie he told on me as a boy. We were lads together working on a farm, and some money was missed. He took it, but swore 'twas me, and the farmer gave me such a hiding I ran away. I fell in with a man who paid steerage fare for me to the Suez Canal, where he got me a job, then I went on to Australia. It took years and years of hard graft to strike oil, and now I'm going to pay back what I owe."

"Supposing that your enemy has left England?"

"Then I'll follow him up."

"Supposing that he is dead?"

"Then I'll wait till I'm dead too. I bet I'll save the devil a lot of trouble."

"I don't see what you want to bother about now. You've won in the battle of life; you have made your name respected by your fellow-men and done good service to your country."

"I have. But look-a-here, youngster. Nothing'll ever wipe out the memory of the licking I got for being blamed for another's theft, and nothing'll ever make me forget that awful lonely bitter winter's night I ran away starving. I was heading straight for the devil if it hadn't been for the man I fell in with; become a real thief, perhaps a gaol-bird."

"But hasn't it ever struck you that your enemy might have really put you on the road to fortune by his own dishonesty?"

"I'll think of that arter I've given him the hammering I owe him. It's up to every man to turn saint once in a lifetime; but he needn't do it till the necessity arises."

That afternoon Heene wrote to his father narrating the conversation with Torridge. The letter he posted at Colombo. The coincidence about the appearance of

Engadee with the architect's sketch, that Raban Heene had lent to Diss, was explainable now on the theory that Merch had got possession of it and used it.

Dick was beginning to feel an influence working above his own intelligence. A chance newspaper article arrested a man's attention because of a picture ; forthwith a whole train of circumstances leapt into activity. The visit to Engadee, the mysterious presence, the meeting with Torridge, the flood of light his story threw on the affair, seemed at first sight to bind the whole thing together into, and be complete evidence of, a daring fraud.

He understood also the insistence of the law on more tangible proof.

Up till that day he had never heard of the partnership between Merch and Diss, yet if the partnership were never legally dissolved, as Torridge maintained, Nora Diss was being swindled out of her inheritance.

The thought set his blood tingling ; all the latent knight-errantry of a lover's nature was aroused. He would win her back her birthright, the birthright she did not even know she possessed. Then came another thought, more thrilling, more intimate. If he became the purchaser of Engadee, perhaps in time it might be the home of both of them—that is, if he won Nora Diss.

But if Nora Diss were the real owner of the Engadee estate he could not become the purchaser. Or it might belong to her mother, not to her. Perhaps Tom Diss never made a will, if his easy-going nature held good to its reputation. There were half a dozen issues at stake. Yet at least he could prove his chivalry to the girl he loved.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

If you're bent on selling moonshine
There is bound to be a track ;
If you're training Bengal tigers
Wade right in—it's just a knack.

THE most curious character on the *Luna* was an individual known as "Josh," friendly alike with man, woman and child. The sneers of his superiors never penetrated his brain ; nor was the aloofness of certain passengers apparent to him until, by sheer monotony, he wore down both sneers and aloofness. He was placidly cheerful ; ever ready to hand chairs from one side of the deck to the other ; always bobbing up in little board o' ship emergencies ; a walking encyclopædia of games.

Who he was nobody knew ; he claimed no particular acquaintance ; he did not talk of himself, nor did he try to borrow money. Yet there was something odd about him. He had a large fair face with grey eyes that could turn very keen and watchful, and a shrewd mouth.

The smoking saloon was having a bet one night over his profession, which no one had discovered, when Josh himself suddenly appeared.

"Want to know my business ? Certainly." He took a card from a small gun-metal case. The nearest man read :

Mr. JOSHUA NIX.

Expert in Nomenclature.

Bond St., W.

A blankness fell on the group. The man who read sat dazed. The next man took the card and stared at Josh.

"Expert in Nomenclature—what the devil's that?"

"Do you mean to say you don't know?"

"Expert-in-no-men-cla-ture," muttered two or three voices. The card was handed round as if it were a curiosity. It seemed too stupendous a fact to grasp.

"Do you know what an expert is?"

"Yes."

"And do you know what nomenclature is?"

They didn't, although a dubious long-drawn-out "Ye-es" followed. From lounging ease they gathered themselves into upright attitudes to stare at this follower of a strange profession. Some of them began to think "Josh" was not respectable.

"Josh" felt that public opinion was drifting away from him, and put his best foot foremost.

"I'll explain, but you must excuse me if I blow my own trumpet. Remember, I didn't invite this discussion; you wanted to know what I was, and I turned up to enlighten you. That is all right. Well, I am one of the first recognized authorities on the genealogy, derivation, assimilation, and deterioration of family names. During my lifetime—I am fifty-seven—I have traced three thousand two hundred and thirty-five names to their ancient source. I have been employed by the——"

"But what the devil's it *mean*?" repeated the first man, utterly bewildered.

"It means everything to the owner of an old and honoured name that has by carelessness been corrupted from its ancient form. Let me explain. The termination of a name, that is a surname, reveals its descent. Take a single one-syllable termination, the letter 'n' preceded by a vowel, 'an,' 'en,' 'in,' 'on,' 'un.' Of these 'on' is admittedly evidence of

rank. It comes straight from the feudal days, and means power, possession, and therefore importance. 'Un' is from a foreign source, and the others mean passivity."

"How do you make that out?"

"From literature on the subject. In the British Museum there are over a hundred old manuscripts bearing out what I say."

"Gibberish! Who cares a tinker's curse about it!"

A chorus of dissentient voices showed opinion ran the other way. Every man was thinking of his own name and its termination. Not many people object to the antiquity of their names; more than a few would like to work up a pedigree, a weakness that calls astute brains of the Joshua Nix type into being.

It did not dawn on the smoking saloon that it was being deftly played by an angler. Yet before the end of the voyage Josh had pocketed some substantial cheques for information rendered. He made a very pleasant living by his researches, and could give the history of every coat of arms in the kingdom. His operations were by no means confined to Australian mailboats. There was an equally good Tom Tiddler's Ground on the Atlantic; he had even found human nature to his mind on the routes to South America. His methods never varied.

Cheerful, watchful, unobtrusive, well-mannered, considerate, indifferent to snubs or sneers, he caught sufficient fish to pay for first-class passages all over the world and a recognized *pied-à-terre* in Bond Street.

Dick Heene, with questioning thoughts about the old time family in Southshire, and with a young man's yearning for kinship in the wonderful homeland, was among those who sought advice from the "expert in nomenclature."

"What form would 'Heene' be in the past?"

repeated Josh, assuming a retrospective air that made his large fair face look scholarly. "It's odd that you should ask that question, for I came across something referring to it the other day. I have the very book in my cabin trunk. Let's go there."

Considerably elated to find his family of sufficient importance to appear in books of reference, Dick waited while Josh unlocked his trunk, and produced a thick, well-thumbed volume. It was a dictionary of names, places, persons, and things, jumbled up together and alphabetically arranged, the forgotten work of some dead and gone student with a turn for collecting odd information. Josh, with his eagle eye ever roving in search of new material, had found it amongst the litter of a second-hand stall in White-chapel. It was invaluable to him. Almost every page bore witness to his own industry in the marginal notes and additions in shorthand.

While his profession was play to him, Josh did not play at his profession. He never let an opportunity slip of adding to his knowledge. Naturally he wanted such knowledge paid for by those who were in need of it.

"Heene, Heen, old form Heyn, Heyne or Heeyn, Irish corruption Heeney. Family settled in Southshire before Norman invasion, once owning tracts of arable land in village of same name. Heyn appears in records of Queen Elizabeth's time, when John Heyn is mentioned for bravery, and given the dignity of squire. Much of the property was lost or confiscated in the civil war, but after the Restoration a compensating grant was accorded by Charles II."

Dick read every word with avidity, unaware that Josh was reading him. To a young man of no particular rank or station who suddenly comes upon a tangible record of his forbears, the world holds half a dozen new doors, any one of which may lead to a land of enchantment that lies on the border of dreams. No young man

admits to such a dreaming. Yet there is a little groove even in the most commercial brain, wherein lie collected the hopes and fears that are never uttered, perhaps never formulated, though kept alive by one faintly fluttering breath from the time of fairy tales and derring-do.

Ever since Raban Heene had spoken of the old home with the Norman doorway, the son's thoughts had gone in search of it, materialized as it already stood at Engadee.

"It's somewhat meagre," said the artful Josh, "but the chances are the writer has condensed it from another source."

"Where?" asked Dick eagerly, meaning to go and hunt it up when he arrived in England. That was not Josh's idea.

"It's difficult to say where. Even I with all my reading cannot remember anything of the kind. 'Heyn' seems to me like one of the old Saxon kings. But I could find out."

"I wish you would. But I shouldn't like you to incur expense on my account. You must let me know——"

"I'll charge you a professional fee. That is my invariable custom." To do him justice he was straightforward. "A preliminary fee of five guineas as a proof of *bona fides* and my usual terms. The longer and more troublesome the search, the more I must charge, as you will understand."

Dick began to see daylight very clearly and appreciated the type of diplomatist that stood revealed.

"I'm not so sure that the matter is worth a search."

"What! The son of Raban Heene to cast a doubt on the value of ancestry to a commercial man. Your father would think differently."

"That's just where you're wrong. My father doesn't care a button for ancestry. It didn't help *him*. What he has done came of his own brain."

"Yes, in a new country, with infinite chances to a shrewd brain like his. But you are going to England, where class distinctions rule everywhere."

Heene took umbrage at the covert advice.

"Then, if I can't succeed by honest business effort I'll certainly not try to drag in a family tree. I'm interested in my forefathers; but I'm not going to spend money on 'em. After all, they have done nothing for me; it's only a matter of sentiment that prompts me to wish to hear more about them. Besides, I'm going down to Southshire to see the old home, and I daresay I'll pick up as much family history as will serve me. I know my ancestors built a church, because my dad says they stole the money to do it, as a white-wash to their sins. He doesn't think much of them, Mr. Nix, and would regard it as sheer waste of money to search out their history. He would say I have taken leave of my senses; I am not sure he would be far out."

Josh was imperturbable. If this fish didn't bite, others did. The first hopeful nibble often ended in this way; sometimes the hook was swallowed.

"I wouldn't dream of persuading you against your wishes, Mr. Heene. Only it's a pity when a young man *has* veritable grandfathers not to turn them to account. It's a different matter when there are *no* grandfathers. I could tell you things of youthful ambition ruined for want of family."

"What bad business policy to embark on a career that wants family, and what strange lack of intelligence not to fake a family since it's a necessity."

"It's not unknown," smiled Josh, "but it's very different from the real thing. I tell you, Mr. Heene, there are dozens of men aboard this boat who would give a thousand quid to put their finger on such a paragraph as that. Yet you——"

"Retain the thousand quid, old chap, seeing there's no necessity to spend it."

"Just so," laughed the imperturbable Josh, locking up the volume.

As Dick left the cabin Torridge beckoned to him from the saloon.

"Excuse me, youngster; was Josh trying to land you?"

"Well, he was rather."

"Thought so. Saw him yank you off to his cabin. He tried it on me; led up to it artful and smiling; just as if it dawned on him that blessed minute. 'I met a man of your name at my club, just afore leaving London,' says he. 'Give him my love when you see him again,' I says, 'he's my long-lost brother. We used to be twins once,' for I dropped to Josh's game. He got fifty quid out of that thin chap opposite, and a promise of five hundred from the fat female party with the diamonds, the missis overheard. But he wasn't to be bluffed so easily. 'How do you spell your name?' he asked. 'Same as porridge—with a T,' I shot back; 'I prefer a capital letter myself and so does the missis, but lots of my relations like small "t's" best, as they think a big "T" too much of a splash when they hadn't the means to live up to it.'"

Heene burst out laughing. The little Mayor was so far above humbug that his contempt for shams shone like a jewel.

"But Josh wasn't done yet. 'Now why don't you change your name back to its first form,' he says, 'when your Saxon forefathers were men of substance and the soil.' 'I never heard of 'em,' I says candidly. 'What put 'em off the soil and the substance? Were they shot off?' 'Nonsense, man,' he says, 'you don't play these jokes on me. You come of the Tawrydges of Torkay.' 'WHICH?' I says, struck all of a heap by this news. 'I dunno whether that's Welsh, or double Dutch, Jap or even Chow. The Tawrydges of Torkay! Were they black?' and then

Josh crumpled up. 'You've only the soul of an oyster,' he says. 'And what's the name of the thing that clings to the oyster for all it's worth?' I asked, and winked at him. But bless you, he didn't take it badly. He winked back. Good old Josh! He's a sport. He deserves to get on. Next day he was at it again. 'You ought to act on my suggestion,' he says; 'a man in your position ought to have forefathers.' 'My dear feller,' I says, 'there's a whole string of 'em knocking round. Some cemtries are so choked with 'em that they had to dig up a mountain to get earth for more. My mother had sixteen children and her mother afore her, and my old man was the youngest of eighteen. And they're all dead but me. How's that for corpses.' "

Torrige's eyes twinkled with merriment.

"There's a man in the second saloon," he continued, "who fancies himself also about names and their meaning, only his dart's native names. He's great on the blacks. Well, Josh sought him out one day—to pump him, I suppose; but the other Johnnie knocked Josh down for disputing his facts. He said the Bonga-walla blacks had some blooming adjective that was French; Josh said it was impossible, and found himself with a bunged-up eye for bothering. Why, native names are just whatever you like to make 'em. There's a place called 'Degilbo' that caused a 'varsity jossor to have a blue fit trying to figure it out as belonging to some particular blacks, when all the time it was the joke of the constructing engineer who built the railway line. The contractor asked him to name the place just to oblige him, and the other chap chalked up 'Degilbo,' which is 'obliged' spelt backwards. People read it and say, 'Oh, how nice to see the Government really preserving the native names.' Then somebody comes along to write a book about it, and so the game of spoof goes on. Josh isn't the only one."

Josh went off at Colombo. He had a brother there, he gave out. The real reason was to pick up the next mailboat. He had gleaned the *Luna* harvest ; the *Soleil* demanded attention, for a particular patron was a passenger, Lady Rose Allway.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

If the sands of time are a treasure-trove of memory, the sands of the ocean are a treasure-trove of possibilities.

THE smoking saloon of a liner is a gathering worthy of psychological study. Every type of man is to be met with, more or less without the veneer of the ordinary world, approaching a primitive state, and dispositions show without the trouble of concealment.

Board o' ship life favours the unconventional. If a man is a snob, his snobbishness illuminates him like a transparency ; his neighbour openly tells him so ; a third criticizes both.

The conversation is frank and calculated to make the rough places of a man's character plain. Curiosity is rampant ; selfishness is its mate. Yet the one thing a man dare not do is to stand blindly against the saloon's opinion, for as in the aggregate men are kindhearted on land, at sea they are prone to bursts of generosity and charity. The eternal song of the waves, as the boat cleaves her way through the world of waters, prompts many moods.

With women there is not the same freemasonry or largeness of spirit ; not because their dispositions are less susceptible, but because of their training.

The crookedly built mummy-god which adorns the social altar demands—or rather receives—sedulous homage. Being a mummy it has no sentience save what it absorbs from its votaries ; but while in their hearts they are aware of the sham, the votaries fear to change.

Women on a liner naturally fall into cliques and cling to the broadcloth of admitted respectability. The smoking saloon verges towards the scantier accoutrements of the savage. It is the Hall of the Give-and-Take.

Every man's occupation is discussed. Curiosity can be baffled or fed ; there is no harm done.

Dick Heene was spoken about as "going home to put some new fabric on the market." One or two volunteered details that whetted interest, and finally Heene himself was asked, "What's this new thing you have up your sleeve ? "

"A material that will create a new industry and give employment to thousands, even if there wasn't a cotton plant left in the world."

"Bunkum !" laughed the smoking saloon. Then from the "never-heard-of-it's" and the "what-boshers" and "you-don't-stuff-me's" there issued a straggling question :

"What is the blessed thing, anyhow ? "

"The scientific name is the *Posidonia Australis*."

The laugh was louder than before.

"Science would clap a new name on a donkey's hind leg ! "

"Well, no matter the name, you all know it. You've all played with it, as boys ; that queer matted fibre like the hairy end of a coconut, thrown up in clumps on the beach."

"What beach ? "

"Why, any beach in Australia, though the chief habitat is the south and south-east coasts. Enormous beds have been discovered on the South Australian Gulf coasts, square miles of the stuff, feet and feet thick. It's to be had for the searching on any sandy beach, though perhaps only in small bunches, which suggests that some agency is at work to carry the seeds or roots and young shoots. Possibly the tides working along the coast-line tear away roots from some of the greater

masses, and in the continued shifting of the sands these roots are washed ashore, buried perhaps for years before they get quite the conditions to suit their growth. Once they start they spread ; they must grow close and matted, feet and feet thick and deep."

" Whew ! I mind it now," interrupted Torridge. " Didn't I get tripped up in it once, staggering along in the darned stuff ; couldn't get out of it anyhow. It was like being caught in a giant's fishing net. So that's—what ? Pos—Possi— What's its everyday name ? "

" Marine fibre."

Several other men remembered the curious reddish matted fibre of the sandy beach, like tangled prairie grass that had been rent to shreds and burnt by the sun, yet still retaining its vitality ; so tough that a man might drag at it all his might and make no impression ; so fine that some of the individual fibres could be used for mending.

" Authorities differ concerning its origin," continued Heene, " as to whether it is a living growth or whether it has been dead and buried for centuries. Some scientists think it is not of marine origin, but produced by the actual retting of a land plant, which has been submerged through an incursion of the sea. Others again think it unlikely that the fibres could have been washed ashore, as they are firmly attached to the plant, and are suggestive of being formerly a vast ocean bed."

" D'you mean to say it's as old as that ? Perhaps it was first planted by Adam. Go ahead."

" Its favourite locality is from high-water mark to an unknown distance out to sea. It has been found under thirty feet of water. This makes dredging more difficult and costly, as the weight of sand has to be lifted and washed out. The innumerable little shells clinging to the fibre constitute another difficulty, as it is a tedious and troublesome job to clean them off without injuring

the strands. The best beds so far are under the sand about twelve feet below sea floor. Those near high water mark are neither so good nor so plentiful as from low tide mark out under sea. If you could view one of the beds laid bare it would resemble a huge coir mat or carpet."

"Well, all I can say is that you business chaps deserve luck by the sackful for your enterprise. I never even heard of the thing."

A grave-faced man looked hard at Heene.

"If I am not too inquisitive I should like to hear how you handle it."

An eager murmur ran round the group. Everybody was interested in this strange new thing that was probably old a thousand years before.

"I'm glad to tell you anything. The stuff's on the market. We have special machinery at work at Pointer Bay, and hope to treble our field of operations shortly. Up till now we have gone along quietly, for we wanted English and foreign expert opinion to back us up. The stuff has unlimited possibilities ; it is extremely strong and is practically indestructible. It will neither decay nor rot. Fire is the only element to damage it, and even then it does not burn easily. The stuff is dredged up, the sand washed out, then the clean fibre packed into rough bales like Indian jute, coconut fibre or hemp ; the finer kind is baled like wool for spinning and making into cloth. It's only a matter of dredging up. If such huge quantities are already there, why can't man's inventive brain help the smaller patches to spread likewise ? The beds in Tasmania are small but of good quality, and if cultivated would mean a big asset in that colony's future. Australia is the only known source of supply ; but there is no reason it cannot be assisted to grow elsewhere. "

As Heene spoke he took an envelope from his pocket-book and produced three or four skeins of whitey-grey substance like thread.

“ There it is after being spun, four grades, natural colour ; it can be bleached to a much clearer tint. It is capable of being much darkened.”

They handled the skeins curiously.

“ Is your firm the only one in the know ? ”

“ We are the principal exploiters, the first to take it up ; but I hear an English firm has also been at work.”

“ How was it discovered ? ”

“ Some shipwrecked sailors found they could tie their tattered rags together with the fibres. Among them was a young chap out for adventure, collecting all sorts of stuff for a book he was writing. He saw possibilities for sailcloth and sacking ; took some of it to England, but people shook their heads as they always do at first. One of the Agents-General was interested and spoke to a relative in Manchester. Between them they got expert opinion which declared it to be the strongest fibre in existence, just what I’ve told you. The question of cost was against it. It would want more money than the thing was worth. One firm said they would take it if offered in a prepared state, not unless, etc., etc. ; so back comes our adventurous friend to Australia, where he told his tale. Everybody admitted its possibilities ; nobody would take it up. Everybody said it would be a splendid thing for Australian trade ; just as unanimously declined to help. It would never pay for the work involved. Last of all he came to us. The upshot was that my father and I went off to see the beds he spoke about and thought it good enough. We had no special machinery at first, but got up sufficient stuff to ‘ show the colour ’ as they say ; had it spun—no, not in England ; in Australia. This was sent to the Manchester firm with samples of the material in every stage. Same old story. If this, if that, if the other—a great future once the first cost was overcome. Who was to defray first cost ? Not the Manchester firm. ‘ Never mind the cost ! ’ said my dad. ‘ Forget the cost and

give me your complete report.' After a lot of pegging away the report came, much the same as I have been telling you. My dad got to work then in earnest ; his name was good enough for a company. The men who agreed to stand in with him are all solid men who can wait for an investment to turn out well, even if it takes years. Machinery, special machinery, had to be manufactured in Holland ; tons and tons of the stuff were dredged up, washed and baled, and sent to England. The Manchester firm stocked it and got to work ; now it is a known commodity on the world's market."

" Good business," shouted a listener. " Let's drink the health of it anyway, and the man who's running it."

The grave-faced man presently took Dick aside.

" I would like a closer acquaintance," he said, offering his card. " My name's Burston, Edward Burston ; I think we might do business together. Of course what I say is in good faith. Have you thought of subjecting that stuff to a mercerizing process? "

" Yes, the idea occurred to me ; but it is too hard."

" Not the finer fibre. Where's your sample? "

Dick opened the little packet and they both felt the texture. Burston singled out the finer threads and moved his fingers in and out. Then he did a curious thing. From a pipe that had gone out he drew some of the tobacco ash, and, moistening the thread with his tongue, gently rubbed the ash to the thread, and held the part so treated between his finger and thumb.

" It's just an idea of my own," he said. " Give it five minutes."

Dick looked on vividly interested.

" Has the heat from your finger anything to do with it? "

The other only replied with a smile that wrinkled

itself on one side of his mouth. Dick laughed outright.

"I expect some magic. Don't raise my expectations too high."

Burston next dipped the thread into a little box holding some white powder, and worked it about. Finally he took out his gold watch and rubbed the thread, now a discoloured gritty mass, against the metal, with the slow, gentle, even touch of a born experimenter.

"Hanky-panky," laughed his amused companion.

The thread cleared, and looked wondrously soft and lustrous against the untreated fibre.

An ejaculation broke from Heene, but his companion manifested no excitement save by smiling in his crooked manner.

"I thought as much ; it's certainly worth spending money over. Now, what would you be inclined to give for a mercerizing process ? "

"My father must settle that. I should say come right into the firm ; but, of course, it would have to be a reliable and patented process."

"I have patented it before I left England ; only I have not had the opportunity or the material to work on. To speak truly I haven't approached anyone over it. The processes already at work are quite sufficiently good and reliable for cotton. My method would cost more ; therefore is only suitable for a product that does not lend itself so readily to mercerizing. I always had an idea that there might be something in existence that would eventually come to me—I'm a bit of a dreamer you see—and here it is. Man alive ! If it works out there's a fortune in it. For after silk comes velvet ; as long as this grey old world endures the folk in it will want velvet."

"And do you know a process for velvet ? "

"Let's get the silk first, old chap."

"Well, how are we to fix it up ? "

Burston thought a little.

"I'm not a rich man ; I can't afford to work for nothing."

"Nobody wants you to. What's your price? "

"One hundred pounds down, and some of the fibre to experiment on. If successful, and you are satisfied, then we do business. If not, all off."

"Wait a second. I must protect myself, or rather my firm. I'm willing to pay one hundred pounds down on the understanding that providing the result is satisfactory, we have exclusive right to your services on this deal. We must leave the actual monetary arrangement until we can feel our way more, and see how the stuff shapes as a mercerized product."

"Quite fair. Let's put it in black and white."

They discussed the prospects of the market. Burston was a man of wide travel ; his quiet manner hid a vast amount of experience and acumen ; his bent was towards experiment rather than business, the ideal man for a helpful partner.

"There's a new idea come up in America," he said, "that may revolutionize mercerizing. A substitute for silk has been discovered by crossing the bloom of wild fibre plants of a particular class with the cotton plants. I saw several samples when I was in Panama. The texture is finer than cocoon silk, and the tensile strength quadrupled. The Panama Government were granting a concession to plant sufficient acreage with hybrid seed with a view to raising a crop for complete tests."

"Could the marine fibre be crossed with the cocoon silk? " asked Dick eagerly.

"No. It could only be mixed. Crossing and cross-breeding can only be done with living organisms ; a marine growth cannot be crossed with a land growth."

They talked on into the night, mutually pleased with this new friendship, and falling into spells of silence as thought submerged speech.

"I've always held the idea that people meet who are intended to profit by and be useful to each other," said Burston, "and I hope we'll both live to rejoice over this night's talk."

Dick did not answer. He was staring hard at something a little distance off. Burston followed his gaze. It was a large purple satin cushion on a deck chair, that lay in the full glare of an electric light, and shone out of the surrounding shadows like some great violet jewel.

"What a startling effect a shaft of light makes," remarked Burston, without seeing any adequate reason for his companion's stare.

"That blessed thing reminds me of—of—what on earth is it? I didn't see anything there a minute ago, it was all in darkness—then a light was switched on and that cushion flares out brilliant purple. Ah! I have it. At Engadee! Stephen Merch held the secret for Tyrean purple. I've wondered what it was," he began to laugh. "You see how an idea can hang on without you being aware it's in your head at all."

The experimenter only caught the words that interested him.

"The secret of Tyrean purple? Somebody you know has it, you say? He's lucky, then, if he knows how to use it."

"He's dead. I never set eyes on him; but certain events necessitated my going to a place he built, and I heard about this Tyrean purple."

"What became of the secret?"

"I don't know anything more; I've often wondered what it meant."

Burston caught his arm and shook him gently.

"Look here, you are only half alive. Why the dickens can't you count two and two? Here's this wonderful fibre in your grip; you hustle and hum over machinery, merchants and Manchester magnates, but you can't see luck sticking out—not a finger but a

whole hand ! Hasn't it ever occurred to you that the stuff could be dyed ? ”

“ Of course it will dye. Didn't I say so ? ”

“ Then what about the Tyrean purple ? Man alive, no matter if the secret's lost for three thousand years, you've got to find it if you have to pull the house down ! ”

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

A woman with an imaginary grievance can do more harm than an honest enemy.

AT Naples a surprise awaited Dick Heene. A woman with wonderful hair, like spun gold, came on board. She looked used to travelling alone, gave her orders in a hard, metallic voice, swept the saloon unconcernedly with large light blue eyes, and asked the chief steward to secure her a good place at table near the gangway.

"I want all the air I can get," she explained. "It is so stuffy with the smell of the food."

Then she surveyed everybody with the placid mechanical gaze of a doll.

"Jehosaphat!" muttered Mr. Torridge, staring in turn. "There's our friend." He nudged Heene.

"Who?" The question was answered in the asking, as a quick memory brought back the picture in the billiard-room at Engadee.

"The widow of Stephen Merch."

Dick felt a sudden bounding of the heart, as if some force not accounted for in nature had touched him. Surely this coincidence could not be mere chance.

The gossip of Camper's Well began to hammer at his brain—the story of a dying man emphasizing a death-bed request: "*You swear to keep your promise, Loo!*"

Had she carried out the promise? She did not look the kind of woman to inconvenience herself for anybody. Presently the big pale eyes rested on Dick.

Perhaps his eyes conveyed a challenge or gave some colour to what was passing in his mind, for she bestowed another glance at him and her lips twitched, not into a smile but into a tightening that suggested she was on her guard. They were thin red lips, slightly curved, without warmth or expression, and the chin beneath was flat. The insincerity of the portrait was doubled in the flesh and blood face. Yet no portrait could do justice to the marvellous texture of her skin ; this, added to the shining coils of hair, emphasized by a hat of turquoise velvet, speedily attracted admiration from women as well as men.

" Now then, youngster," whispered Torridge, " take my advice and stick up to her, if you want to get at the truth. Let her fancy you know more than you do."

Much the same kind of thought was running in Heene's mind. He intended to cultivate the acquaintance of this woman to discover the mystery of Engadee. Whether he would get at the truth was another matter.

Stephen Merch's widow had kept those thin lips closed for many years, and was not likely to open them now. Yet he would try for Nora's sake. To regain an unknown inheritance would be a deed worth the doing ; the Round Table fraternity never did anything half so useful.

" Bless my soul ! " exclaimed Maurice Darley. " It's the ' Louis d'Or ! ' "

" You know her too ? "

" I should think I did. Why, it was I who gave her that name, years ago when I saw her riding a wild colt with her hair streaming in the wind. She ran off with a circus and took the name with her. It was the name of a model in the Latin Quarter who caused more yellow paint to be splashed about than all the sunsets put together. Well, well ! "

The sculptor had not been much in evidence during the voyage, as he was not energetic enough for deck games, and liked to read and dream away from the

crowd. Yet he had made friends, as Raban Heene intended that he should, and found one or two commissions.

He now went forward to greet the golden-haired widow, and she responded at once. Her manner was quiet and without a trace of the devilry ascribed to her.

"She's had the sense to drop the circus," observed Heene.

"Oh, she's a jolly clever woman," replied Torridge. "Nobody guesses how clever."

Some of them were to find out and pay for the knowledge, Heene among them.

"May I call you the 'Louis d'Or' still?" Darley was saying to the new arrival.

"Do. I call it to myself sometimes. It was a lucky name to me, and I don't want it to die out. I write it on my photos."

"But you've given up riding?"

"Years ago, when I married. I'd had enough of it. The circus wasn't like the wild life of the run; I loved the horses, but hated the men and women. I loved the sunshine and the wind and the weather; but spangles, limelight, sand—oh, no, no! So I married and gave it up."

Dick Heene edged a little nearer and overheard part of the story she was telling Darley, about her life at Engadee and subsequent wanderings. But she said little of her husband. Dick cast about for ways and means to probe her mind, when they would become acquainted, as must inevitably follow in a day or two. The fact that he was a probable purchaser for Engadee must be already known to her, as the agents spoke of cabling.

It fell out much as he expected, with one addition that was to work mischief later on. Dick was so earnest in seeking the desired goal that the Louis d'Or jumped to the conclusion he was in love with her; and as he

pleased her fancy, she imagined herself in love with him !

By the time they had reached Gibraltar she had manœuvred matters to the climax of expecting a proposal. Dick stood aghast !

He had followed when she had beckoned, sat out on deck in the moonlight, carried her rugs and cushions, read to her in the hope of becoming confidential. When the confidential moment arrived—the Louis d'Or was making love to him, calling him her “ dear silly boy,” “ Dicky darling,” and “ Heenums.”

Whereupon he dropped the attempt at discovering truth, and went hot and cold at the muddle he had made of the business. She watched him with anger in her pale eyes, and her hard voice took an accent like the snap of a handcuff.

“ Why are you avoiding me ? ” she demanded, pouncing upon him when he thought himself alone. “ Oh, don't trouble to tell lies. You *are* avoiding me. After getting my name coupled with yours, and I fool enough to think you honourable, you clear off like a dingo gone back on its first set of ideas.”

Dick did not like the simile.

“ I hope I am honourable.”

“ It's easily proved,” she said in a softer voice. “ I am sorry I spoke crossly ; but I heard people sneering——”

“ Sneering about what ? ”

“ About you and me—saying at any rate the *Luna* had made one match——”

“ Who said this ? Tell me the person who started the gossip and I'll soon settle him—or her.”

“ How can I tell who it was, only a few days on board ? I heard it, that's enough.”

“ You point out the speaker ; I'll find out his identity or hers.”

“ I didn't look to see ; it was enough to hear.”

“ A man's voice or a woman's ? ”

The Louis d'Or grew red and angry.

"I'll not be cross-examined like this. You speak as if you didn't believe me."

Heene was at a loss for words, and his silence inflamed her the more.

"You thought me safe for flirtation because I've been a circus rider——"

"Nothing of the kind, Mrs. Merch. I showed you only the ordinary courtesies of board o' ship life ; there has been no flirtation."

"Indeed ! How was it we became so pally in a few days ? I didn't know you from Adam when I came on board ; yet next day you were squeezing my hand."

This was pure imagination on the widow's part ; but it made the young man very uncomfortable. She triumphed maliciously in his silence.

"Do you deny it ?"

"I do. There's not a word of truth in it. As for not knowing me from Adam, you told me your agents had already cabled you my offer for Engadee, and that I was on this boat."

The Louis d'Or ignored her first form of attack and snatched at a chance of revenge.

"*Your* offer ! I'll see that you never become the owner of Engadee—not a stick nor stone of it ! I'll teach you flirtation can be an expensive pastime. Not if you offered fifty thousand !"

"My dear lady ! You speak too authoritatively. Are *you* the owner of Engadee ?"

She fixed her great eyes on him in amazement.

"Have you gone off your head ? Don't you know I am ?"

"No, I do not. You are the widow of the man who built the place and bought the land. But whose money did he spend ? And what death-bed promise did he make you give him concerning restitution to the rightful owner ?"

The Louis d'Or's fair skin flamed into scarlet. She made a sudden movement as if to strike him ; but the steady accusation of Heene's eyes pulled her up.

"It's a lie!" she ejaculated in a fierce splutter of words that showed how desperately she was fighting for self-control. "I'll make you pay for this. Such a statement is rank libel and can bring heavy damages in a court of law."

"I can only say I'll be ready to repeat it when the necessity arises. Good morning!"

She caught his arm as he turned away and almost swung him round in the strength of her fury.

"You're not content with making a fool of me, but must turn me into an enemy. Mark me, I'll get even with you. Whatever your game is—I'll spoil it, even if I have to follow you to the end of the world."

"Then I must take precautions to safeguard myself."

She flung his arm away and rushed to the side of the ship, where she stood beating her hands savagely upon the rail.

Considerably perturbed Dick Heene went to his cabin for solitude. The fat was in the fire now with a vengeance. The Louis d'Or was capable of attempting reprisal ; but it was the scene that troubled him, not the woman's threats. He blamed himself for such attentions as he had shown her, remembering, however, that she had led him on.

Then another phase of the matter presented itself. In the event of legal proceedings by the executors of Tom Diss, as must necessarily accrue, how was the evidence of fraud to be collected? Torridge's statement would set the lawyers ferreting ; but a forgotten partnership of a quarter of a century before could not be held valid unless there was actual proof of it. Where was the proof? Destroyed, if the widow Merch had anything to do with it, thought Dick ; yet might it not be possible that Stephen Merch, actuated by the wish to make amends, had made some written statement

that he had kept secret from his wife? If so, where was it?

“ At Engadee ! ”

Dick started. The words sounded clearly enough, uttered in a low tone he could not describe save as a mental voice, or a thought voice. He wondered if he had uttered them himself in his strung-up condition.

What put the question of a written statement into his head? Supposing it did exist hidden somewhere at Engadee, who was to search for it? Not he, since his business in England meant several months' absence. Yet he felt that he must find it. Nora's inheritance was at stake. Dick's business was also at stake—a business that was to be an asset to the state. He must concentrate all his force for the issue before him. He must win. To help recover his usual calm he pulled out his pocket-book and became immersed in notes and calculations.

On the deck above his head the Louis d'Or was making some resolutions on his behalf.

“ I've got the name of his continental agents, and I'll bluff him all along the line ! ”

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

Observation of one's fellow-creatures is a financial asset.

ANOTHER mailboat was nearing Naples, the *Soleil*, with Lady Rose Allway and Nora Diss on board. The redoubtable Josh was also a passenger, urbane, lynx-eyed, imperturbable as ever. During the run from Colombo he had made a fair bag, and won the good opinion of an Indian judge for some effective remarks on terminal consonants.

Better still, Lady Rose Allway recognized him. The "expert in nomenclature" had done "research work" for her in the past, in connection with an American heiress she was piloting. She had another job of a similar kind for him now.

Nora Diss must have some sort of a pedigree if she was to marry a title. Though the girl herself was unconscious of Lady Rose's methods, she openly wished she had nice relations.

Fellow-passengers talked of their "people" in Hampshire or Kent or Devon, and she imagined them to be in possession of many thousand acres. The scattered remnants of the Diss family were chiefly in Whitechapel. Like all Australians she imagined that to be a vortex of vice and villainy. She did not mind their poverty, and they must be dreadfully poor to live in such a place; but the awfulness of Whitechapel! If they were only in Hampshire or Kent or Devon, no matter what their financial position might be, she could

go and see them. But Whitechapel! The scene of murders and brutalities; starvation and misery; streets so narrow that the sun never shone in the windows of the gloomy houses; whole families living in one room; seamstresses that starved on sevenpence a day; slums that no one dare walk in alone!

The Australian mind only knows Whitechapel from the cables and the terrible tales of misery set forth.

Nora's heart was wrung with pity for these poor kinsfolk of hers. If she could only discover them and send them help. To visit them was impossible. Lady Rose said so and shuddered.

"You could only go with a detective or a policeman; my dear, believe me, it wouldn't do."

So Nora shut off thoughts of the Whitechapel Disses and enjoyed the voyage with healthy exuberance. Often she wondered how Dick Heene was progressing in the mailboat ahead. Would they meet in the fairyland for which they were both bound?

Life was too full and sweet for shadows. She dressed becomingly, and was the radiant centre of every diversion.

For this potential princess a pedigree must be found. Josh knew what was expected of him without waste of words, for he understood the aims of heiresses; but he could not get his price. In fact, Lady Rose haggled about it.

"Twenty pounds are ample," she said.

"I got a hundred from the American," he reminded her.

"She had more money."

"I can't do it under fifty."

"Then I'll do it myself," said Lady Rose.

Josh was not put out in the least. He looked at her with real admiration.

"And you'd do it too, my lady, just as well as myself. What partners we would make!"

Lady Rose was not offended. Indeed she had done

a little in that line of business already, as she had dabbled in most things that brought in a satisfactory harvest.

"I'll do it!" exclaimed Josh, "on one condition—that you put me on to some Americans coming on board at Naples. Jinker, the name is."

"I have business of my own to see to at Naples. Besides, I never heard of them."

"No. But they'll make a bee-line for a title and try to scrape acquaintance with you. So if you'll put in a little word for me, I'm your servant to command."

"I'll think of it. They might not be desirable."

"Oh, they're all right. Been the guests of the Princess Touba——"

"Eh?" said Lady Rose, becoming interested.

"It might be worth your while, my lady, to take them up. All I ask is, if you can possibly do so, switch me on to them."

"Certainly, if I can. And this Diss matter, get to work at once."

"Diss is of French extraction," mused Josh gravely; but there was a twinkle in the old rogue's eyes. "The name was probably D'Iss or d'Iss—how's that?"

"Obvious. But I must have proofs. You have to find out this foreign family."

"Consider it done," said Josh.

The business Lady Rose wished to settle at Naples would have occasioned curiosity in an observer, but she took good care to have no prying eyes in the vicinity of the deck where she gave audience to a clean-shaven man with English features and an occasional American accent.

Although their conversation was close and absorbing, the stranger had merely raised his hat on greeting her and did the same on leaving.

"My letter from Melbourne will already have

supplied particulars," she said. "I've nothing further to add save that I should advise immediate action."

"The initial expense is enormous," he answered. "Unless you could give us a guarantee to get the stuff taken up by men of known position we are averse to the risk. With your influence in securing some man of mark, the affair has a different complexion."

"That I can promise to do, of course on a business understanding."

"We could allot you a proportionate number of shares."

"I would prefer a cash settlement."

"H'm. How much?"

"One thousand pounds."

He received this statement without surprise, merely shooting out his lips a little.

"I would have to talk it over with my firm."

"Certainly."

"And we would require your guarantor to become an active motive power at once. Otherwise it would be idle for us to spend large sums in machinery only to find we had no market. Would your guarantor be sufficiently influential in securing us the English trade?"

"He's a member of the Cabinet."

"H'm. The Government is shaky."

"Are Governments ever anything else? But please yourself, Mr. Wise; those are my terms."

"As I said, I'll go over it with my firm. These local people who have taken it up already—are they sound? What's their value? Have they substance?"

"They are working in a hand to mouth fashion. Articles have appeared in the Australian papers about their venture. These I forwarded with my letter and samples of the raw product; but they have made no headway in Australia—the very place where you would expect it to be taken up. In fact, beyond the cursory interest of the newspaper articles nobody knows anything about it."

He listened with a shrewd, set face, weighing her words.

"That only proves in my opinion they are keeping it dark. It's quite likely they may have found a solid opening somewhere."

"The Australians are not built that way though. Everybody knows everybody else's business out there, and it's the custom to haul the local governor in to give his benediction to the undertaking. I've been a guest at all the Government Houses, and not once did I hear the subject mentioned, save what I said myself. If there were men of substance interested it would be known at once. Each Government House is a rallying centre."

Still he was dubious.

"It may be that they are playing too deep a game. If they are out for a world market, I don't see what they want fooling round Government Houses for."

"You mistake my meaning. Moneyed men and speculators are all watched out there to get an inkling of their financial movements. So they are everywhere for that matter ; but there's a difference."

"Have they Continental agents ?"

"Not that I could discover, and only a third-rate English one. I tell you, Mr. Wise, they are quite unknown."

"Perhaps they have backers in Japan. It's just the kind of stuff for the East. The Japanese Government may be running it. If so, they are nifty enough to ship it off to America and have it on the market before they are even awake to it in England."

"All this is for you to thresh out. I wrote to your firm, Bachler & Co., knowing their enterprise. I can't spend any more time, as I am expecting friends."

The stewardess hurried along the deck scanning the various groups, then came directly to Lady Rose.

"The Princess Touba is looking for you, my lady."

Lady Rose gave a slight nod of dismissal and walked

away. Her recent companion leisurely took his way where most people stood ; he spoke to one or two and finally got into conversation. Nor did he leave the *Soleil* till Marseilles was reached. He learnt a good deal during the intervening hours. Though little or none of it pertained to the subject he had discussed with Lady Rose, it was interesting enough for his notebook, for he derived a considerable addition to his income by such means. Could anyone have read the superscription on the envelope he posted at Marseilles it would have been puzzling, perhaps irrelevant. It was addressed to Berlin, not to a business firm, but to an official in the Wilhelmstrasse.

At Naples there was more scope for the strategist than first appeared. The desirable Americans introduced by the Princess Touba took second place in her scheming brain because of another passenger, an ordinary young man whom nobody noticed—save Lady Rose.

An ejaculation escaped her, and she moved quietly forward to where the new arrival had thrown his bags for the moment while he turned for a last word with a friend.

On one bag the initials H.P. were painted ; the larger had a slip card—" Hubert Peyton."

" Travelling *incog.*," she mused. " I must keep it up. It's five years since I saw him ; I needn't remember him, though he's sure to remember me. This is a chance indeed. Now shall I tell Nora or not ? Better not ; she might be constrained and conscious, and he might take fright."

She passed on, with that fixed, unseeing stare of hers, intent on wirepulling and elated of heart.

For " Hubert Peyton " was the young Duke of Reith, unmarried, and therefore much in vogue among the heiresses of the time. He was in a tourist's suit and without an attendant, evidently doing things for

himself, and wishful to dodge the tuft-hunters peculiar to liners.

He was of good appearance without being striking ; grave of face and smileless, with a sandy moustache and neutral-tinted close-cropped hair. A dandy could have done so much more that Lady Rose concluded that " Hubert Peyton " was possessed of a pose to make the least of himself. A duke in this mood, possibly with serious thoughts about the obligations of his station, needs careful handling.

Lady Rose's stare never once rested on him ; but she took good care he saw her. He did just what she expected—hurried away from her vicinity. Evidently he did not wish to be recognized. Then Lady Rose manœuvred a face to face meeting, when she glanced at him casually, gave a second surprised look, and seemed about to speak when he anticipated her.

" How do you do ? "

" Dear me ! " said Lady Rose. " I had no idea——"

" No, no, of course not," he interrupted with youthful haste, adding in a low tone, " nobody knows—*incog.*"

" Ah ! What's the notion ? "

" Can do things so much cheaper. Those beggars of Italians have only one idea. You haven't changed a bit."

" You have. I like it."

He flushed slightly under her scrutiny. Lady Rose had good taste, and he appreciated the approval of a mature woman of the world.

" I should not have recognized you had we not come full tilt on each other. You must have come aboard at Naples ; it couldn't have been Suez."

" Naples—yesterday."

They strolled along the deck talking in fragments, she describing her visit to Australia, he asking questions : Was the place worth going to ? Was it possible to

dodge the hospitality they showered on visitors? Could a trip be carried out *incog.*? A fellow saw so much more if left to himself.

Their stroll took them near where Nora Diss was standing, the centre of an excited group. She was busy scribbling on some loosely folded paper, everyone around her shouting suggestions amidst bursts of laughter.

Lady Rose paused discreetly. Nora looked her best in this kind of setting, flashing with her native vitality, laughing, explaining, contradicting, charged with the irresponsible vivacity of the southern sun.

"Oh, Lady Rose," she called, "I've an inspiration. We are going to play 'Lions' to-night—no, not roaring lions, but 'Latter Day Lions.' Everyone must impersonate some celebrity, and as it's all modern dress the only trouble is making-up. The most successful 'lion' will be entertained at supper by all the other 'lions' and awarded a prize——"

"Supposing it's a lady lion, Miss Diss," called one of the officers; "there's lots about."

"Then she'll hold high court of lions at afternoon tea."

The throng were eagerly discussing possible characters. Masculine opinion settled on heroic kings and generals and scientists; feminine views circled round actresses and public women.

Hubert Peyton's eyes expressed frank admiration.

"Jolly girl! Is she Australian?"

"The tall one? Yes, she's travelling with me; the daughter of a very wealthy squatter. Her people have connections in the Admiralty."

She was much too clever to offer to introduce him, but continued her stroll, noting, however, that he was inclined to linger.

"How do you kill time on a long voyage like this?" he asked.

"Nobody thinks of it. Time kills itself. There's a

hundred things to do or leave undone, just as you please."

A burst of laughter made him turn his head.

"Let's go back and see what nonsense they're at."

Lady Rose smiled faintly to herself.

Hubert Peyton stood on the edge of the group. Half a dozen young men were offering themselves for some post, but Nora shook her head.

"You're much too frivolous, all of you. A judge must be serious—he mustn't even smile."

The would-be judges sent up a shout of mirth. Nora's eyes, turning questioningly from one to the other, encountered those of the young man with Lady Rose.

"Will you be a judge?" she asked, point-blank.

"Certainly. Of what?"

"Of lions. What name, please?"

"Peyton!"

"How do you spell it?"

The *incog.* duke found himself spelling his patronymic much as he used to spell at school. The youth in him awoke under the magnetism of her voice; he forgot rank and station to join in this democratic rough and tumble game of "Latter Day Lions" on a liner, amidst a group of madcaps whose sole creed was to laugh round the clock.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

Merriment is the magnet of friendship.

" LATTER Day Lions " raged for the remainder of the day and evening. No longer time could be allowed, as several people were leaving the *Soleil* at Marseilles, and impromptu necessities sent the boat into a whirl.

Cabins were ransacked for photographs, pictures, ideas ; the barber's shop denuded of fancy ball requirements, never a large quantity, of false hair, beards, and similar embellishments ; the barber himself hard pressed to get four score customers transformed with magical celerity.

Costumes were anything and everything. The woman of many jewels took the opportunity to exhibit them and call herself by the name of an Indian Princess. There were sporting enthusiasts who personified winners of every rank and degree. Actors, authors, soldiers, statesmen, appeared with more or less fidelity, according to the skill in making up. Feminine fancies lost in effect because of the general desire to look youthful and attractive ; only one or two dared to personate age. Nora Diss identified herself with a Breton girl, who swam out to sea to relieve a wrecked boat ; but not many had read of the incident.

Everybody sat down to dinner in character. The critics took up the judging afterwards.

Hubert Peyton, now frankly called " Peyton " by his shipmates, bent to his work of judging with a will, and gained more actual knowledge of celebrities who had

impressed themselves on the fleeting hour than he had amassed in his life, for every representative of the character chosen could reel off a string of worthy doings that made an ordinary listener gasp at his own lack of memory.

It was curious that national feeling vetoed any inimical personality, no matter how learned or brave, or highly placed. Patriotism clung about the merry-makers, just as the Union Jack gave distinction to the decorations, for no event is complete on board ship without bunting.

The guessing of characters instituted a battle of wits, with not a little dissatisfaction if the guessing went astray.

Just when criticism ran highest, a figure in a naval uniform strode forward, on his back a placard :

Palmarum qui meruit ferat.

THE FINEST CAPTAIN IN THE SERVICE.

He made a low bow to the Commander, who had paused to look on. He was a replica of the Commander himself !

“ The prize is yours ! ” said Peyton, amidst the cheers of the whole gathering. It was the neatest of compliments, though the cheering sent the real Commander away blushing.

Then a space was cleared for dancing, and the “ Latter Day Lions ” forgot their characters in flirtation, the usual end of such diversions.

The Duke of Reith began to see life from a point of view he had never contemplated. The association of so many people of his own age, rampant with youth and the joyous freedom of board o’ ship life, swept him into a vortex he made no effort to resist.

Class was strong with him ; he could never forget his rank ; but the ruling principle of *noblesse oblige* that had swayed his ancestors held a secondary place in the

workings of his mind. In which he was eminently modern. His object in life was to do the best he could for himself, in education, entertainment, advancement, anything. Since chance had thrown him among these merry-makers he welcomed the chance.

If snobbishness prevailed among the older passengers, the younger ones were fairly free of it. A foreign prince of haughty mien was picked up at Naples, and by way of a lesson in equality the merry-andrews hustled him on provocation, and his deck chair went overboard.

The Duke of Reith felt mischievously glad. Recollections of similar "raggings" constituted a bond of sympathy with the roysterers. Yet beneath their wildness there was an earnestness that he lacked, and he had the sense to understand. The men were eagerly absorbed in their different occupations or professions. The few rich enough to be untrammelled by thoughts of a career were searching for possibilities. The girls discussed every subject under the sun with a breadth of view and a positiveness that made him smarten up his own stock of ideas.

To have no ideas was to announce oneself a bore. Rather to his own surprise he was impelled to put his best foot foremost in this mad jostle of youth and youth's desire to set the world right.

He frankly sought the society of Nora Diss, and Lady Rose complacently watched the growing acquaintance. If matters proceeded at this pace she would earn her guerdon without much trouble.

She decided to keep the girl in ignorance of Hubert Peyton's rank. He was charmed with her light-hearted unconcern, wearied perhaps with the imperturbability of his own class, yet not attracted towards the over-vitalized American heiress frankly bent on capturing the market.

This Australian who simply regarded him from a comradely point of view, without showing any interest in his calling, was a novelty in womanhood.

"How do you think I would get on in your country?" he asked her.

"Get on how? As a visitor—or as a wage-earner?"

"Well—either."

"You wouldn't get on at all at the start," she answered. "Not till you've lost the standoffish air all Englishmen have when they go out first. They think themselves superior, and it irritates the local product; but after a little they lose it. Were you thinking of trying your luck in Australia?"

"I might."

"Because I could give you a letter to my dad, if you were thinking of pastoralist matters. He might help you to a billet."

This to a duke! Hubert Peyton smiled, and she caught the twinkle in his eyes.

"Perhaps you're above billets—want to buy up the country?"

"Not so ambitious."

"There's parts you can get cheaply."

"So I've heard. A pound a paddock. What good would they do me?"

"Not a bit. Unless you buckled to for real hard work; and by the look of you, I do not think you have ever handled a spade in the whole of your life."

"Is handling a spade your ideal of a man's occupation?"

"It should be second nature—like shaving."

He laughed quietly; then, as the joke appealed to him, laughed again.

"I wonder what you think I am good for—three guesses."

Nora regarded him critically.

"A tutor; a tramp abroad; an English traveller for some foreign firm."

He beamed rather fatuously and hugged the thought of his *incog.*, intending one day to astonish this undiscerning and outspoken young woman—for he meant

they should meet again. He took occasion to warn Lady Rose.

"I say, don't give me away ; you've promised."

"I'm as silent as the grave. But tell me why ? "

"Just a joke I want to play off."

Some vague recollection of her methods recurred to him ; but she was not the only woman of her class to put such gifts as she possessed to commercial value, and there was nothing to arouse his suspicion.

Smoke-room gossip said she was "running" Nora Diss, and was making a very good thing out of it.

Then little by little he began to wonder about Nora Diss ; every now and then he caught himself in a fit of musing of which she was the pivot. So far he was not the least in love with her or with anyone. He would no more have dreamed of proposing to her than he would to Lady Rose. Yet he liked the increasing cordiality of their acquaintance. There was something different about it from his friendship with other girls ; he supposed this was because his rank was known and deferred to—whereas this Australian rated him as a possible English traveller for some foreign firm. It was the first intimacy of his *incog.*, and it appealed to him. When she left the boat at Marseilles, he marvelled at the crowded impressions of two short days.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

Happiness depends on the point of view.

NORA was not without friends in England, people of the right kind, as Lady Rose expressed it. Among her invitations was one from Sir Samuel Gisbon and his wife, absentee Australians, with a love of travel and a brood of daughters to settle advantageously.

Some years before, Sir Samuel, then minus his title, had put the seal on a beneficent record by succouring the widows and families of Australian soldiers who fell in the South African war. If the ensuing knighthood illumined his career in one way, it spoiled it in another ; for henceforth there was no peace for him until his wife had transplanted the whole family to England, where, by virtue of her husband's wealth and her own good birth, she meant to come as near queendom as it is possible for an outsider to attain in the social arcana.

Sir Samuel himself was merely one of the thousands of squatters who have developed the land and the labour of their hard-working sires—a man with the frame of a blacksmith and the fancies of a baronet ; an ever-open purse and helping hand ; and with only one ungratified wish in the world, to get back to the country he loved, where the sun's kiss was a burning scorch and the land quivered under a heat haze that veiled the sky-line.

But Lady Gisbon loved the fleshpots of Egypt, and on one pretext or another delayed the departure.

The far-seeing Lady Rose discussed them before the voyage commenced.

"As the invitation is a long-standing one, you can arrange it as you like, and it wouldn't be at all a bad idea to time it for Christmas. We can get off at Marseilles, and spend a few days only in Paris. But you must write at once and let them know you are in my care, so that the answer meets the boat at Naples."

The wirepuller was already familiar with the Australian custom of "Bring yourself and your friends," and she knew that the invitation would also include her and so save hotel bills. It happened just as she wished.

"Sir Samuel and Lady Gisbon would be charmed to see Lady Rose Allway at their country residence, 'Dipple Dale,' Southshire, etc."

The rush to Paris, the gay whirl of the shops, the emotional aspect of every phase of life, passed like a dream of the morning.

Lady Rose found her *protégée* like wax in her hands, for Nora was too dazed to express an opinion. A systematic drilling of the French tongue since her childhood helped her to some sort of proficiency; but the *prestissimo* effect of a foreign language invariably submerges the novice, and to her Paris was a very Sphinx of cities.

London was home. She could have cheerfully dispensed with the Christmas invitation to wander amongst the crooked streets that spoke of an historic past, to get lost a dozen times a day, to go without her meals for the absorbing pleasure of watching, listening, touching even the solid grey walls.

But there was no time for sightseeing. After a fervid plunge into the selection of Christmas presents, she was whisked off to Southshire. Then disillusion began.

Before many hours were over Nora felt a little chill of homesickness. She wished the voyage had been arranged in the New Year, and that she could see England in her own way, for the things she loved were nothing to Lady Rose.

Sometimes a three-century family tree is like a fetter

on the understanding. Lady Rose was almost as ignorant of London and its treasures as a South Sea Islander.

Lady Gisbon, too, was changed. Kind-hearted enough still, she had adopted little mannerisms held to be the correct thing in that secondary set of high society which imitates what it cannot compass.

The Gisbon girls were like their mother, and quite alive to what was expected of them. Nora had known them in pinafores ; but now they patronized her and spoke disparagingly of " Australian " ways.

Fortunately there was a boy at hand, the son and heir, Sam Gisbon, as noisy an atom as ever got loose from Eton, with the true Australian knack of searching out kindred spirits and swamping the house with them.

Sir Samuel was just the same, hearty and sincere. He took Nora in his arms and kissed her.

" Remember, I'm Father Christmas," he said, " and bank manager and fairy godmother. If you get stuck come to me. I love Australians. Some day I'll go back."

" Don't you like England ? " she asked.

" It's well enough. God bless the dear old mother country ; but the poor old thing's asleep. I left as a boy and called myself an Englishman ; now I'm proud to call myself an Australian."

" Father's quite silly on the subject," laughed one of the olive branches.

" I need to be with such a ring against me," he replied. " Would you believe it ? Not one of my girls ever want to go back ! Now, Nora, don't you get like that."

" She's dying to be there now," struck in another daughter ; " but when the time comes for returning, she'll want to stay here ; they're all the same."

Sir Samuel became confidential.

" Just as soon as the twins are hitched off—it's going to be a double event in the spring—I'm for ' down

under.' I want the sun on my old bones once more. I've told Jenny so a hundred times ; but she's always had the excuse of the girls. Now when the twins fly the nest, I'm free, and I'm determined. Jenny must come home."

"What will you do with Dipple Dale?"

"I don't care what becomes of it. Jenny likes it, and I've settled it on her. Probably she'll always be wanting to race across the ocean to see the girls, and buy new frocks, and she must have a roof somewhere. But let me once get back to the sun, and I'll stick there till I frizzle."

The "roof" in question was an imposing structure recently built, attractive enough in the modern style, with extensive grounds that attested the skill of the designers. Though evidence of wealth showed everywhere, there was no vulgar display. Lady Gisbon understood her aims too well for that.

In her welcome to Lady Rose there was no lack of cordiality ; but no overwhelming attention. Lady Gisbon wanted nothing from her. Now that her own brood were off her hands she could have taken up Nora Diss, and, as she told her husband, saved the Iretons a considerable sum of money.

Mr. Bernard Ireton, who was in the Coast Protection Department of the Admiralty, was just then on leave of absence through illness, and could not do anything towards entertaining Nora till his return. His wife did not want to be bothered with strangers, and travelled with her husband as an excuse to let their London house.

There were plenty of resident Australians to offer hospitality ; but Lady Rose squashed their invitations by a mere raising of the eyebrows.

"I do not care to meet these people, Nora, and you can scarcely go about alone. After the Gisbons, I am arranging several visits among my kinsfolk whom you will find more useful."

Instead of nerving her *protégée* to a becoming rever-

ence for the knowledge that was to come, it achieved the opposite result of making that independent young woman fretful of the yoke. "Once a friend, always a friend," and her heart yearned for those of her own country, bound to her by long acquaintance and many memories. A letter to an old schoolfellow revealed her mind and her original way of looking at things.

CHAPTER TWENTY

New-comers and Old Customs object to the same harness.

" MY DEAR CHUMMIE,

" London has come and gone like the twinkling of an eye, and I know nothing of the ' big smoke ' save the long lines of buses for ever rolling onwards, as if *en route* for some gigantic festivity.

" All I know of London is that it has millions and millions of doorsteps over which oceans of whitewash are poured every morning, and the effect is thought most perfect.

" ' But what's all that white intended to represent ? ' I asked. ' There's no white like that in nature. Grey stone is beautiful ; but daubed with white it becomes unmeaning.'

" ' It looks so clean and so cared for.'

" ' Only for five minutes. The first caller leaves ugly footmarks.'

" ' Oh, well, it looks respectable.'

" That's it. The Great Panjandrum Respectability must be splashed on the doorsteps.

" And the houses. All stories, and stories. Londoners want four legs, two for ordinary walking and two to go upstairs with. It's a plural place with its ' teas ' and ' coals,' and the home of queer expressions, ' beanfeasts,' ' non-stop,' ' alight,' and all sorts of odd people set up a demand for Christmas boxes—to wit, the street turn-cock : a personage that Americans can understand no more than we Australians.

“ The things I wanted to see and do had to be postponed because of this rushing visit for Christmas to the Gisbons. *He* is fine, the same old true blue dad calls him, with his joke about a rabbit rampant for a crest ; but *she* is pretentious, wants everybody to understand that she is not any of your common Australian stock, but a sprig of a veritable county clan with a dim and distant title that got lost in the Wash. The girls take after her : allude to old friends as ‘ so Australian,’ which got my blood up. ‘ Your father made his money there anyway, and his income. Is that “ so Australian ” too ? ’ We had a bit of a scrap, and dear old Sir Sam took my part. But as he joked over it, we buried the hatchet amicably. ‘ It’s not the girls’ fault, Nora, it’s my wife’s, for being so negligent as to hatch her brood in Australia ! ’

“ I am quite aware it is mean to talk like this, but it isn’t behind her back, for I said it to her face, or rather the combined female face. She preached me a little lecture about certain crudities and gaucheries that cling to the newly-arrived vestal, and I led her to particularize them. Then I remarked quite innocently : ‘ And snobbishness—is that to be cherished ? ’

“ Now, mark me, chummie, whatever I do or whatever I leave undone, or however big a fool I make of myself, snobbishness will not be among my sins. I’ll just go dead against it.

“ Among the customs of a bygone day that Lady Gisbon honours is an absence of serviettes at lunch !

“ ‘ But why ? ’ I asked fairly flabbergasted, for this was the craziest idea.

“ ‘ All families that pride themselves on their lineage should try to preserve these little distinctions.’

“ ‘ But you used serviettes at lunch in Melbourne, and you had your lineage then.’

“ ‘ My dear Nora,’ she smiled pityingly, ‘ Melbourne is—Melbourne.’

“ ‘ A jolly good thing it is,’ I snapped back. ‘ Here’s to the little gold mine with the capital M.’ ”

“ But that’s a bagatelle to other queer habits. The maid Lady Rose and I share between us is responsible for what I am about to relate, and I set it at first down to imagination. Don’t go thinking I am giving myself airs with a maid to hook my back ; but Lady Rose decided it must be.

“ ‘ It is absolutely necessary when visiting in England to have a maid,’ said my mentor in new morals, ‘ though I am too old a traveller to bother about one on a voyage.’ Too wise a woman to burden herself with unnecessary expense, she meant, for I am beginning to find Lady Rose out.

“ You can always pick up some girl of refinement who’s got ideas, but is useless for domestic work.

“ It happened that a desirable creature of this kind was amongst the third-class passengers on the *Soleil*, and had asked the stewardess to mention her qualifications if a chance came, with the result that Lady Rose approved of her, and Amy Hale became maid to us jointly. As all my life I have been used to doing things for myself I felt puzzled as to the girl’s work, save to hook my back, as I prefer to dress my hair my own way. But her other taskmistress keeps her going.

“ At the end of a week here at Dipple Dale, Amy Hale gave notice.

“ ‘ I can’t stick it another day, miss, and that’s the truth. I don’t want to put you out, you are all right—one of the best ; but I draw the line at the queer ways they have in this house.’ ”

“ ‘ What sort of ways ? ’ ”

“ ‘ Oh, I don’t mind being called “ Hale,” that’s done everywhere—except when they make me out French, then I’m Josephine—but the way the servants eat their dinner, not one word said the whole time, solemn silence like a blooming funeral, and when the butler has finished his meat we are all supposed to be through with ours.

Then the housekeeper and the head parlourmaid rise and eat their pudding in another room——'

" 'Oh, no !' I laughed.

" 'Yes, miss. It's the truth, and I don't like it. I complained about it to the housekeeper, and all I got was, "It is an old custom we like to follow. We are one of the few families in England to keep it up." The fewer the better,' I said.

" However, I persuaded the girl to stay. Lady Rose says it was an actual custom of old families over a century ago ; but democracy has invaded the servants' hall as in other places, and there has been trouble. Moreover, a lady's maid is not considered on the house staff.

" This brings me to the class feeling of which you have heard ; but you wouldn't credit your senses to see and hear the rampant jealousy that prevails.

" The iron crown of Lombardy, whatever that is, is not more hard and fast than the sets of social circles that have their own little tin gods.

" The nearest town is just now rent in twain because of the presumption of a lady who has succeeded in placing herself in the vanguard.

" 'Surely a doctor's wife is somebody ?' I asked.

" 'Yes, but not a surgeon's wife !'

" A tennis club is among the delights of this coterie ; but a girl who joined found that no one would play with her because she was a tradesman's daughter. Her father, a wine and spirit merchant, has done a lot to help the place, and is respected highly by the few who have brains.

" But best of all—or, I should say, worst—is the distinction that the farmers' daughters draw between themselves and labourers' daughters and such small fry. They do not even pass the time of day !

" I wanted a frock altered, and out of curiosity went to the little village dressmaker at Spike Hatch—it sounds like Chinese—an energetic, well-spoken little thing with

good ideas. She takes a hand in the Sunday School, where also the daughter of a farmer magnate is a lady help. This latter looks on the other side when she sees the dressmaker *out* of Sunday School. But in the sacred precincts she is Christian enough to deal out cool nods and icy smiles.

"Ah, me! To think that this beautiful England should be a land of noughts and crosses.

"There is the dearest little Welsh curate here, the Reverend Cadwallader Tratt, who told me I reminded him of the ancient princesses of Gwalia. He's one of the few Practical Idealists in this country, for he allows the young men to play football on Sundays as a necessary relaxation; but takes care to yank them all into church first, where he gives them a sermon that he invites them to criticize freely afterwards.

"I have eaten my first state luncheon at the house of one of Lady Gisbon's circle. This surgeon's wife was among the guests, sweetly spoken and softly smiling; but she had the devil in her eye.

"Generally, lunch in England, whether at hotel, boarding-house, or baronial hall, is a slice of cold beef; the higher the hall, the thinner the cut. It is a source of grief to us carnal-minded, meat-eating Australians, and we learn to value bread as a stop-gap. On the other hand, dinner is a bonanza banquet. But this state luncheon was a kind of rehearsal for Buckingham Palace.

"I managed to conceal my terrible Australian ignorance through several courses, for I had seen (and you bet, eaten!) most of the goodies in our own little city with the capital M. But at last I met my Waterloo.

"It was a course of what seemed to be the tiniest eggs, semi-transparent, and served in a nest of fibre; not a real nest—I could see it was manipulated.

"Well, for the life of me, I couldn't tell what the eggs represented, or whether you requisitioned knife, fork, or spoon. I glanced round warily to see how others

in my vicinity were tackling theirs ; but not a blessed one of them was doing anything else but talk—and also glance round warily like myself. I couldn't see much as the table was so piled up with flowers ; but nobody seemed to be troubling over the queer little eggs, yet the funny part was the eye-play going on, as if to see what one's neighbour did.

“ The blankest ignorance prevailed over the mastication of those eggs. I kept talking rot to my partner, answering such inspiring questions as ‘ Is it really very hot in Australia ? Is it true you have no rain there ? ’ (These conundrums are the stock-in-trade of the English Johnnies.) All the time I felt I would choke if I didn't investigate the mystery. So whether I lived or died in the attempt, I plunged in.

“ ‘ This is the time I miss my chopsticks,’ I said aloud.

“ ‘ The which ? ’ he asked, and I could see ears being cocked in the vicinity.

“ ‘ We always eat these things with chopsticks at home,’ I answered, ‘ because it's originally a Chinese delicacy ; but I do not see any, so I'll have to depend on my own devices.’

“ With that I took an egg in my fingers and placed it in my mouth, scrunching it, I trust, daintily.

“ ‘ Is that the way you eat 'em ? ’ he said, and it was the only human thing he did say. ‘ I didn't know what they were.’

“ Would you believe it, chummie, in less than a minute all the rest were doing the same ! But what the eggs were I don't know to this day, save that they tasted like eggs ; but the shells were of sugar and gelatine. What French fake can do ! Anyhow, I stood to die a sudden death, and slay everyone about me with my daring. Yet we lived.—Yours ever,

“ NORA.”

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

A rag-picker's basket may sometimes become
Pandora's box.

MAURICE DARLEY, sauntering in and out of the narrow lanes that converge towards Temple Bar, drew breaths of keen enjoyment as if the air were the rarefied product of Swiss mountains.

Life held no more positive delight to him than this wandering in old by-ways where once lived and moved the wits of two centuries ago.

Now and again he shook his head mournfully as he missed some remembered haunt, absorbed into a new thoroughfare that left no trace of historic spots or ancient names.

"Wych Street was here," he muttered, tapping the new pavement, and trying to locate some sign. "I had a room somewhere round about." But Wych Street was shattered to pieces by the housebreakers years ago.

Once it had been possible to rent a scrap of a room in this neighbourhood; his hope was to find a little place now. Twenty years ago he and a chum lived over an oil shop, paying ten shillings for the top floor; and underneath them, a journalist and his wife. The oil shop was gone, and the neighbouring houses, even the very lane, had disappeared. It made him rather sad at heart.

He retraced his steps and emerged at the back of the Law Courts in a short, wide street, deserted save for a couple of rag-pickers, who were sorting their possessions

on the pavement. They sat with their backs against the brick wall of some printing works, lazily occupied in an unexpected burst of sunshine.

As Darley paused to watch they gave him a nod and friendly smile. It was curious to notice the systematic way they put their miscellaneous stock into different heaps while their truck stood in the gutter.

Garments so old that Darley wondered what could be made of them ; umbrellas in fragments ; piles of magazines ; hats that suggested the fray of a football match ; broken pictures, tinware, crockery, and a mass of correspondence.

It was this last that claimed their special care, for they straightened out every envelope and every sheet of paper, glanced at the contents and placed them in several little piles.

"What will you do with it ? " he asked.

The rag-pickers smiled at each other, but did not reply. By accident or design their eyes rested on the tiniest heap of the lot, a few odd coppers found in the ragged clothes ; from that they smiled up at him. He understood and laughed.

"It wants topping." He stooped down to place a sixpence on the worn farthing that crowned the treasure.

The rag-pickers nodded brightly.

"You're the real sort, guvnor ; it'll get us a meal. We don't dine at the Cecil as a rule."

"Can you still get a threepenny feed round here ? " asked Darley, with the memory of what the coin did for him a score of years before.

"Not far off. We can get more for sixpence together than thruppence each separately ; taters, bloaters, cocoa, bread and jam."

"How much d'you think the lot will fetch ? "

"A couple of bob, if we has luck. Arf that more likely ; none of the stamps is vallable."

He gathered that they were saving the envelopes

because of the stamps ; but they lapsed into sudden silence in the scrutiny of a letter. One rag-picker placed it in a battered pocket-book he carried.

" This looks like a find. Sometimes we gets one. Letter thrown out careless like, we take it back, might get five bob reward, once arf a quid ; allus sure of a tanner, praps more."

The pair showed such cheery optimism that Darley was drawn to them and felt for another sixpence.

" Have a good blow-out to-day, boys," he laughed.

" Steak an' inyuns, you bet, guvnor ; arf a pint an' two out."

They smacked their lips in anticipation of the assured banquet.

" Once I lived round here," said Darley. " I've come back after twenty years."

They gave no reply. Their attention was glued on a document, faded and worn in the folding.

" Blimey ! It's a will ! Wot luck ! "

Their eyes shone with excitement and their tanned faces grew rapturous.

" What can you do with a will ? Where can you take it ? "

" To a lawyer chap who's allus on the look-out for sich like. If we gets hold of a real missin' will our fortin's made ; for we'd get enough to go to Horstraly. This bloomin' country's played out."

It was odd that for want of a livelihood he should come from a place that seemed their Mecca.

One rag-picker remained silently scanning the paper ; then he shook his head doubtfully.

" 'Taint a will. It's a rotten rigarole."

His mate's face fell as he slowly read out one underlined sentence :

If no heir be found in England seek out the scattered members of my family overseas. Engledree has always been held by a H——

"Eh, what?" cried Darley. "Engledree? Read that again."

"Engledree has always been held by a Hee——"

The lad bungled the name. Darley snatched the document excitedly.

"Heyne! Great Jehosophat!"

The rag-picker sprang up and regained his paper. In this violent passing from hand to hand it tore on the folds, revealing another paper inside.

"I'll give you half a sovereign for it," exclaimed Darley. This aroused their suspicions. If the "find" was worth that it was worth more.

"A sovereign, then." This was worse.

"How much do you want? It's no use to you. I'll give you as much as the other man—more, for that paper refers to a friend of mine. For all I know it may be a missing will, and if so you'll be rewarded."

His offer hung fire. With the shrewdness of their class they felt chary of this sudden interference. The pair leant over the piles they had been arranging and held a muttered conference.

"Five quid, guvnor; an' if it turns out a missin' will, fifty quid."

"Oh, come, come. I'm not worth five quid. I'll give you what the other man gives you; take your names and addresses, and if it's genuine, you shall be rewarded."

They still demurred.

"'Ow are we to know *you* are straight, guvnor?"

"I'll go with you to the nearest lawyer's if that will suit you better—anyone you like."

They glanced irresolutely at the paper. After all it did not read like a will. Darley peered down to discover more; he saw that the thin pointed handwriting was that used by women of a past generation. An inspiration came.

"I'll tell you what. My friend is named Heene, and

I think it is his family mentioned in this document. Come with me to him, and you'll get a reward. We are staying not far away at an hotel overlooking the river." He mentioned the name ; but it tended to make them more suspicious. Yet they evidently wished to deal fairly.

" Would you mind jes lettin' us talk it over a bit, guvnor ? "

" Certainly." Darley strolled up the street, wondering at the odd chance that should make him an instrument of possibly bringing good to the son of the man who had set him on his feet.

" Hi ! " shouted the rag-pickers, and he turned. They had decided to trust him. One was to accompany him to the hotel, the other was to attend to their belongings and the barrow.

Thus Maurice Darley and the rag-picker became comrades for the moment, and not a soul gave even a glance at them. Busy wayfarers in London streets have no concern but their own.

Darley found that Dick Heene was in the private sitting-room they both shared. The hotel had been chosen because of its outlook on the busy river and, what was vital to an Australian, its sunny aspect in the grey winter days. They could watch the gulls soaring and swooping and circling, flashes of white light against a cloud bank with a red sun sinking to rest.

Dick stared at the visitor. Darley burst into speedy explanation.

" This young man has found a document that may concern you, and I have promised a reward when you see for yourself. You told me about your family at Engledree ; well, here is what seems like a will, with a mile-long statement of something that happened in the dark ages, written by a woman calling herself Mistress Margaret Heyne."

The torn document contained a thin slip of paper gummed between the two large pages. Dick, reading

hurriedly, saw this was a list of names all spelt "Heyne," setting forth marriages with issue, and in some instances deaths.

"I never heard of Mistress Margaret Heyne," he said. "As her signature is dated 1830 she must have lived before my father was born. His name is not on the list; but perhaps his father's may be. It sounds rather mad:

I, Mistress Margaret Heyne, of Engledree, Turne, Southshire, do earnestly desire and devise that if no heir be found for the property and estate after my death, search shall be made for the scattered members of my family overseas. A Heyne has always held and ruled at Engledree, and though the quarrel herein mentioned and set forth occasioned a feud, kin calls to kin, and the race must not die out.

"It's enough to bring a hornet's nest of Heenes swarming round," observed Darley. "It is not a genuine will anyway, as neither heirs nor executors are mentioned. Evidently it's been in some legal man's possession, and been shot out at last as of no value."

"But somebody's got to inherit the Engledree estate, and perhaps it's my dad. She must have had a lawyer at some time or other. If we could only find out where these lads got the paper."

The rag-picker was quite willing to take up the search on promise of reward. Dick gave him a sovereign, with another to follow when the information was forthcoming, making it clear, however, that the document was not a missing will and of little value save as a curiosity.

It took some time to impress this on him, as his hopes ran on a "find." In the end Dick consented to arbitration, by allowing the rag-picker to ask advice from the "lawyer chap," and finally making the acquaintance of the same individual, a smart young fellow just starting in his profession and glad to get in touch with a business man, especially an Australian. Eventually

he took up some legal questions for Heene, and steered them to a satisfactory issue.

The long rambling statement occupying the remainder of the foolscap sheet dealt with a quarrel amongst the Heynes at the end of the eighteenth century over the sale of a hundred acres of land, of little interest to posterity since the land was sold.

All that Dick Heene gained by the discovery was some definite knowledge of his family. The document had not been thrown out of a waste-paper basket ; but from a sack of old paper that a caretaker could not sell.

It served to unsettle him. He decided to go to Southshire then and there.

"Since I had ancestors what's the good of them unless I turn them to account ? "

He was among people with ancestry of one kind or another, and he wanted to show that he, a son of the Southern Cross, was built on the same lines, a desire not so snobbish as it seemed, since it has its origin in family affection, or as the dead Mistress Margaret Heyne put it, " kin calls to kin and the race must not die out."

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

No man can transplant another man's memories.

DICK HEENE'S ideas of smiling English counties received a shock when he arrived in Southshire, for in December the land was desolate.

The name of "Engledree" was unknown at the little local station, but the village of Turne was within walking distance.

He asked for a meal at the inn, thereby creating an astonishment that impeded the movements of the landlady. The place was black with age, with ceilings just above his head, squat windows that he could not understand to be beautiful because they excluded the air. He felt that he would choke with the stuffiness, winter day though it was, and sighed for the great spaces of his own land.

"Everything's chock-a-block here," he thought.

The ruins of an old castle that once boasted of holding six thousand prisoners within its walls tempted him from the road. Its extent was still marked by the outlines of the wall, but little else remained save part of the keep. A platform led to an improvised roof whence a fine sweep of view could be seen, water and rolling meadow, though only scanty signs of cultivation.

Traces of giant frescoes appeared on the interior walls of the keep; on the outside many plants flourished in summer, but in December the ivy was paramount, with great roots like knotted snakes. Here and there these were chopped through, but the ivy had too firm

a hold. Trees that marked their growth by centuries towered beside the grey pile, old before they put forth a leaf.

Many birds remained still in sheltered spots ; but Dick did not know the English birds, save the robin, and he marvelled that its breast was not the glowing red of romances.

The village of Turne consisted of a row of cottages, ending in a post-office and an old Norman church ; but the parish of Turne ran all ways for twelve miles square. Engledree was marked on the map, though he could glean no information about it. Nobody had ever heard of the Heenes. It was somewhat disturbing to his vanity to thus attempt a return to the home of his ancestors, where there was no trace of a home and the ancestors were all swept into oblivion. Worse was to follow.

He puzzled over the lines on the map and bore on to the left. The road began under a Roman reputation, then gave out to a series of flagstones, a tolerably good path at first, but trailing off into a track, which stopped altogether in a hamlet on what appeared to be an estuary. Just then it was a stretch of mud. It was marked on the map, but Engledree was on the other side.

“More like the entrance to Hades,” he thought, “than a track to civilization.” He looked back ruefully on a rocky steep of slime and mud, shells and stones and *débris* of the sea.

Presently a faint grey shadow in the distance began to shimmer and creep up the estuary ; lifting the various craft and giving a thrill of life to the desolation until it became a bay awakened from slumber.

Blue and green mottled the surface, and the purple masses of a lowering sky made patches of colour. All that lay between was a dreary swamp with vessels lying on their sides, their chains buried in mud. The ooze would not permit of walking across, but a man pointed ahead.

"Keep right on till you get to the water, then wave yer coat an' the boatman'll come."

Dick ploughed on, somewhat damped in spirits, yet trying to see where the fascination lay.

"There must be something *I* can't find. The old granddad held it as a memory that nothing could beat. It can't have changed much. Where the dickens is this water and this blessed boatman? I wonder if I've got into the wrong county?"

Another heavy half mile brought him to a lagoon; on the further side the ground showed sign of cultivation. He waved a handkerchief and whistled for the problematical boatman, but not a soul was in sight.

"How on earth do they get about to their work—if they do any work?" he broke out impatiently. "Wave my coat," the fellow said; "perhaps they don't understand handkerchiefs."

He took off his overcoat and shook it vigorously, peering into the distance.

Presently a moving speck appeared, and from amongst the shadows a boat materialized with a huddled figure at the oars.

"I want to get across."

"Um." The man looked ruminative though not stupid, and offered no other response.

The comparison with Hades grew in force. This might be another edition of Charon crossing the Styx. The lagoon was uncanny enough for grim associations.

"Can you direct me to Engledree? I want to get to a little place of that name."

"Endree. Keep right on till you come to a stile, then follow the track."

"Ever heard the name of Heene round there?"

Charon shook his head.

"What's the fare?"

"Anything you like. Jes put it there on the seat while I gets her in."

He put his fare ashore on a still more desolate spot,

and Dick found himself scrambling along a narrow embankment with a foothold for a cat, the marsh on one hand and long rank grass on the other.

There was neither stile nor track. Rising against the horizon was a flat house on a solitary reach of marsh, with great patches of colour amongst the slimy green.

The tide crept noiselessly onwards, spreading silently over the stretch of flat land until it became a shining sheet with a green fringe on the further shore ; while near him towered an old windmill, black and weird and broken, with red cottages clustering round it built on piles of brick. The mill once figured in the *Domesday Book*, but was now abandoned.

At last the stile came into view. Dick felt it was like looking on the face of a friend.

The track widened considerably and led to a bridge, where a ha'penny toll was demanded. This surprised him rather, as it was the first time he had ever been called on to pay toll.

" Do many people go across ? "

" A tidy few, sir, mostly to the island."

A glance to the left showed that he had travelled in a wide sweep, and that the character of the country had changed. A little island lay on the sea front with home-like buildings and gardens.

Facing him was an old-time house, shut in by great trees. The bare branches veiled a square façade with a Norman doorway and windows. An avenue of stately trees, magnificent even in the skeleton garb of winter, marked the entrance ; from a second gateway, leading to some milking-sheds, he could see children at play, tossing their red caps into the green field and starting some water-fowl from a pond of rushes.

He stood gazing for some minutes with a lump in his throat. This old house was very like that other house fifteen thousand miles away with the Norman doorway. Could it be the home of the Heenes ?

"Where is Engledree or Endree?" he asked the children. His heart leapt at their answer.

"This is."

"Who lives here now?"

"We do."

"What's your name?" He hoped they would say "Heene," but their nimble tongues answered—

"Johnson."

"Did you ever hear the name of Heene?"

They never had. It had vanished from that part of the world.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

Fate chooses strange instruments.

DICK sought out the owner and explained that his progenitors lived at Engledree, and that he would like to see the old place.

In Australia such a request would have prompted immediate hospitality ; but the Englishman was stolid and hesitating. Evidently he considered the incident extraordinary.

" I'll speak to my wife," he said.

The wife was worse than the husband.

" The deeds are at our solicitors," was her reply ;
" but our tenure is perfectly legal."

" I am not casting any doubt on your tenure, madam ; I am only anxious to have a look at the old home of my family. The name of Heene must appear in the deeds."

" We bought it from Robert Heene before he went to America ; the title is perfectly clear."

" Could I not have a look at one or two of the rooms ? "

Dick felt rebuffed, but was determined to gain his point. " Could you not spare five minutes to show me a few of the features after coming all this distance ? "

They relaxed their churlishness somewhat and yielded, preceding him into the living-room, large and low-ceilinged, and with little alteration.

" My grandfather was born here," he said, " but went out to Australia in the gold rush of '51."

They were not interested ; the fear of a possible

claimant still clung to them. People who live much alone in a sparsely populated district cannot readily divest themselves of doubt or suspicion.

Dick looked longingly up the wide staircase in the faint hope of being allowed to see the upper rooms, the bedrooms that had witnessed the birth and death of so many of his progenitors ; but the present owners were too dense to take a hint.

He was mystified as to their station in life. They spoke well, yet their movements suggested people who worked.

" I suppose you call Engledree a farm ? " he asked.

" Well, scarcely," the man replied. " The acreage is not big enough now, though it must have been a fair-sized place enough once. We sell the produce, of course ; but that of itself wouldn't keep us had we not private means."

This was to impress the stranger and attest their importance in the social scale.

" We really came here because of the milder air," the wife added.

" Mild ! " Dick smiled, and remembered the nipping breeze across the marsh.

" Of course, you are used to great heat out there," she went on. " You never have any rain or cold weather, do you ? "

He seized the conversational opening and they thawed a little.

" We have a fine view from the staircase window ; perhaps you might like to see it ? "

" It is extremely kind of you. I hope I am not giving you too much trouble."

They went upstairs in a solemn procession, and the man pointed out objects of interest in the wide sweep of country.

" On clear days we can see the Isle of Wight boats passing, even the glass on some of the roofs sparkling. Which way did you come ? "

"By the most desolate track it is possible to imagine."

"Ah, the other line would have saved all that."

Dick felt moved to further achievement after this minor success, and boldly turned to look up the rest of the staircase. Husband and wife hesitated a moment, then she led the way as before, and Dick had his wish. The chief bedroom was crammed with heavy walnut furniture that shone with housewifely care. She touched it lovingly.

"This is the best walnut in the county; we have been offered fifty pounds for that chest of drawers—tallboy, it is called. Oh, yes, we took it over with the house."

"Then at one time it may have belonged to Mistress Margaret Heyne," said Dick, who knew nothing whatever of old furniture.

"Was she a grandmother?"

"Something of the kind."

In leading the way to another room a thought occurred to the man, and he beckoned Dick to the stair-head. The oak banister commenced with a solid post, about six inches square, with much slighter railings descending.

"You'll be interested in this. Just catch that firmly and turn towards you."

He indicated the narrow part under a large terminal knob. A man's hand could span it, and Dick felt it move under his grasp. The second turn set up a creaking, and presently the knob came away, revealing an aperture.

"A secret recess," he exclaimed in surprise. The post was hollow and capable of containing a hoard of money or valuables. "What a clever hiding-place; they had no patent safes in those days."

The wife shook her head.

"I doubt whether it was as good as it seems. Once it got known outside the family what use could it be? Robert Heene warned us not to trust to it."

But Dick liked to think it once held treasure. Then suddenly a memory took such hold of him that he forgot where he stood. His visit to Engadee came back vividly, and he remembered that the interior of the building as well as the exterior followed the plan of the English house. The staircase turned in just such a way ; he had rested his hand on a large knob as he mused over the strange presence that had manifested itself. The same feeling of contiguity crept over him again, though he was too confused to understand.

Mr. Johnson conducted him through the orchard and garden, pointing out the fields at the back and the use to which they were put. But Dick only half heard. His interest in the old home of the Heenes was decreasing in proportion as the mystery concerning Engadee was renewed.

Perhaps the December bleakness chilled him, or blinded him to find beauty in such a desolate landscape ; but he felt sorry for the long ago Heenes who lived there, and marvelled still more at the way his grandfather talked of the old place.

His new acquaintances pointed out the road to another station in a different county, and Dick was glad to return to London.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

Revenge is no man's birthright.

MR. and Mrs. Torridge were also discontented with Southshire. After hunting up their own kith and kin and descending upon them—uninvited it must be owned, though loaded with gifts—the pair detected a lack of cordiality.

Neither the kith and kin nor they themselves struck a note in common. Inquiries concerning old friends and relatives served a mutual ground of sociality, but this was limited. One cannot ruminate indefinitely on old acquaintances. The people who were dead or had drifted elsewhere henceforth became a blank to the stay-at-homes. Letters kept up the interest for a little, then it flickered and failed.

The Torridges had given scant attention to correspondence; now they found what many a returned Englishman has also discovered to be depressing and disappointing—that blood grows as thin as water in the lapse of time.

“We ain’t wanted, Ben,” said Mrs. Torridge, gloomily. “It’s a mistake bothering about Southshire. We might just as well have stopped in London and seen all there was to see. Your folk and my folk can’t make us out—why we should strike oil and they have to worry along. And I don’t forget nor forgive your cousin saying, ‘Well, these ‘Stralians must ha’ been pretty hard up for a mayor when they made one of our Ben!’”

“He didn’t mean any harm, Bella. Why, he’s only

been up to London twice in his life. Don't you go taking notice of him."

"Didn't I just! I gave him rats. I read him what the papers said——"

"He wouldn't unnerstand, poor old Bill. He was brought up not to look at a paper on a Sunday, and sticks to it still at sixty-three, and that's the only day he's got for reading. He'll ask the news and repeat it; but he wouldn't read it for himself. I might be just the same if I'd remained here."

With this mention of the turn in his affairs there always arose the memory of the incident leading up to it, and his face settled into a frown. His wife hated that frown with a full comprehension of the war in her mate's heart.

"Let's get quit of this place," she suggested.

"Not till I've settled the score I owe."

"Now, Ben, old man, take my advice and drop it. You say you believe in me afore all the world."

"I do, old girl."

"Then don't go agen your luck. It was Gawd's doing though the devil acted umpire; so just leave well alone."

The little red man scowled.

"I'm going to find that d——d Tenter and give him the thrashing *I* got for his theft."

"What d'you call yourself with Christmas just gone and the New Year only begun!"

"That only bucks me up. He got me basted for his lies and his sin, and as long as I live I'll not forget that dreadful night I ran away, starving and cold and wretched, black and blue with the beating I got, glad to creep into a hedge and shiver to sleep. And not a friend in the world!"

"Ye had Gawd! What more friend did you want? He looked after you. Let bygones be bygones."

"I will when they are bygones, not afore. And I'm off on Tenter's track to-morrow."

"If everybody comes back home to pay their debts like you, there won't be much of a crowd in heaven."

But he was not to be dissuaded.

Next morning he set out leaving the gentle-hearted Bella a prey to dismal imaginings, and travelled to the little English village where his enemy lived. His inquiries were so cunningly worded that they failed in their purpose of gaining correct information, so that when he appeared before Tenter's cottage he stood staring. Beyond the fact that Tenter lived there with his family he knew nothing.

His plan was to go right up to the door, knock and ask to see Tenter. Then he would say, "D'you know me, Tenter? I'm Ben Torridge, the boy you got basted for your theft a lifetime ago; and now I'm here to pay you back. Off with your coat and take that on account."

The "that" was to be the forerunner of several knock-down blows, for Torridge in nursing his revenge had taken lessons from a pugilist.

But this little programme did not come off.

When the Mayor of Locker Gully opened the gate and entered the garden to walk straight to the door, he came to a sudden pause. Nor did he knock at the door, for the door was already open and he saw into the room.

And what he saw was this: A man about his own age strapped into a great child's chair, his hands puffy and helpless, his eyes heavy and lifeless, his huge face pendulous and stupid, while beside him stood a girl feeding him with a spoon out of a basin.

The coarse animal mouth did not have even instinct enough to open till the spoon touched it, then half the food slobbered over the towel tied under the flabby unshaved chin. Between the intervals of swallowing came gruntings and splutterings, and the girl was not too gentle with the spoon or her attention.

She turned and saw the little red man staring at the door.

"What do *you* want?" she asked pertly.

"I say, Miss, is th-th-that-that—Tenter? J-Jim Tenter?"

Torridge's voice shook as he pronounced the name of his enemy.

"Yes, it is—what do you want?"

But Torridge stood staring, flabbergasted, forgetful alike of where he was and what had brought him there.

"What do you want?" she repeated shrilly. The food being meantime arrested, the gruntings and whimperings increased.

For the first and only time in his life Torridge was tongue-tied. He backed a few steps down the path, beads of perspiration on his forehead, then suddenly he turned tail and rushed away, flinging the gate wide open and never looking behind, never even hearing the shrill-voiced girl's angry comments, never pausing till he had covered a good mile and found himself in unknown country.

Out of sheer exhaustion he sank on a heap of road metal, and in wiping his face saw that his hands were shaking.

"Good Gawd!" he gasped. "And him younger'n me. I've planned revenge all these years, and come all this way for it, and he's not worth it. I might as well hit a log of wood. Oh, lud! It makes me feel like going to church and taking a pew all to myself to say my prayers in for a week. Gawd forgive me!"

The Mayor of Locker Gully was glad to accede to his wife's suggestion about returning to London, or indeed return to Australia, for with the failure of his cherished revenge he felt rudderless.

What he had considered a solemn duty to his manhood was taken out of his hands. He had the sense to see it never lay in his hands; that in arrogating to himself the office of Providence he had only attested his own smallness.

He did not like to recall that horrible sight of human

impotence, and it took all the faithful Bella's coaxing to extract the story.

"There ! You nearly ran agen your luck, Ben," she said gravely. "Let's get out of this beastly country ; I'm full of it."

"So'm I," assented Ben, and they commenced to pack.

But the maelstrom of other people's affairs caught them.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

The hand of help must hold the gold of the heart.

AMONG the pleasures Mrs. Torridge had promised herself was a visit to her old mistress, Lady Julia Malstead, with whom she had commenced life as a little village sewing-maid, before going out to Australia with her parents.

Lady Julia had shown kindness in those days, and the warm-hearted Bella wanted to prove herself worthy.

"If she's got kiddies, Ben, we must send the best toys we can buy; and if she hasn't, we must think of something special."

That was before they started. In the end they bought a gift in Locker Gully, a gold gem-set pencil-case swinging on a fine gold chain. But they could not discover Lady Julia. A letter to her brother, the Honourable Vincent Spoylle, brought no answer. That gentleman was too much exercised over his dismissal from the viceregal staff; his return to England was a necessity, as he could obtain no other appointment. Fortunately a title came to him at this juncture, and as Lord Groundage he covered his dismissal with the urgency of private affairs.

Then came dreadful news of Lady Julia. Her husband had divorced her and report described her as penniless. People said the Spoylle line was played out, run to waste. Bella Torridge shed more tears than all the erring lady's friends put together, and set out to find her, a pale, frightened wreck of a woman, long ago

weary of the river of sin, without an idea how to pick up her life, browbeaten by her relatives for the slur on the scutcheon, or rather the publicity of the slur in the papers, for the scutcheon was pretty dim already.

"I mind the day she got married," sobbed Bella. "In signing the marriage registry her sleeve caught the paper and blotted it, and they said it was a bad omen."

Bella Torridge, sorely tempted to break down at the change in a face that was once so lovely, described her life in the new country and the husband who was such a hero among his townsmen. But when she offered her little gift it was Lady Julia who broke down, and then, forgetting rank and station and the years between, the faithful little village sewing-maid put her arms round her former mistress and soothed her as she would a child.

"Don't you fret, my lady, there's lots of shine left in the sun yet."

"You are the only sincere being in this insincere world," sighed the poor lady. "I wish—I wish I could show how I appreciate your fidelity."

"I've got a wish too," said Bella, hesitatingly, "but you mightn't like me to mention it; yet you see, my lady, you are just the same to me still. I mind all the wunnerful things you knew without being told, that were Greek to me, like cards, how it was right to leave one of your own and two of your husband's——"

"Don't mention him. I trace all my misery to my marriage," and before this faithful soul she wept the bitter tears that were scalding her heart.

Bella was cogitating how to express herself to practical purpose.

"My lady, you believe me sincere, don't you? Because you'll not mind me saying something that's in my mind——"

"Say anything you like."

"It's a personal question, my lady, and I can't help hearing things; and I heard, I heard——"

She stopped in dead fright at the enormity of what was on her tongue. The white-faced, weary woman mistook her meaning and smiled bitterly.

"You can't hear more than the truth."

"Then it's true about—about—I mean, oh, not about the *man*, my lady, that's nothing to do with me, but about yourself. They say you are—*poor*!"

The climax was so different from what she expected that Lady Julia laughed mirthlessly.

"When was I ever rich? Some people *are* poorer, not many."

"Then—then—you said I might speak, my lady."

"Go on."

"It's this." Bella's face was the colour of a peony, and she spoke rapidly. "If you'd like to leave this beastly country and go to some place where you'd be quit of all your people, I could help you."

"You! How?"

"With the means of doing it. My husband's a rich man——"

The lady flushed now and spoke haughtily.

"Does *he* know? Have you planned this with him?"

"Not a word," said Bella stoutly. Which was a lie, for she did nothing without Ben. "I've means of my own and you're welcome to them."

"I couldn't think of such a thing."

"Just because I once sewed for you, my lady. That's what makes you refuse and me offer. It's all along of this beastly, classy country that won't let you take a good turn or do one, unless it is straightened out like a tape measure. Now, my lady, you were kind to me once, when I was quite a girl; can't I pay back without any question of class? You and me will never meet again—can't you let be me a friend? Won't you? And think Gawd sent me unexpected and unawares, to tide you on a bit till better times come."

"There can be no better times for me."

"Not unless you put your shoulder to and give 'em a shove along," said practical Bella. "Won't you let me fix up something?"

"What can you fix up?"

"Don't you want to clear out of it all?"

"Oh, if I only could!"

"Then you shall. Where'd you like to go?"

"Where I never hear a word of the English language again; where I never see an English paper; where I never meet an English face."

"Lor! My lady! You'd be dead in a week."

"All the better."

"Oh, my lady, why don't you buck up?"

But that was what the divorced lady couldn't do. The creed of *noblesse oblige* died with the invention of steam. She had tried to brave it out and failed, leaving her floundering in the depths of bitterness.

"Let me fix something up, my lady, and not a soul shall know."

"Why should I take your hard-earned money?"

"Lor, bless you, it isn't hard-earned. It isn't earned at all. The mine went up like a kite and Ben was in the know. He gave a thousand pounds towards the Town Hall, and the same to a hospital, and never winked an eyelash. Now, can't I be as good as Ben?"

"What! Give me a thousand pounds?"

"You've struck it, my lady. Not plump into your hand like a ploughboy, but genteel like; oh, I've had to learn a bit out there—place a cheque to your credit, my lady. Then you can draw on it and clear out without a word to your pigs of relations."

"Oh!" cried the shipwrecked one, springing up. "What a temptation! What a temptation! Never to see this rotten country again!" She placed her hands over her eyes to shut out vision. It had been her life study to respect the conventions, no matter how recklessly she treated the commandments, and now conventions could share the fate of commandments for all

she cared. The sin of being found out is the worldling's sole decalogue.

"Just you cheer up, my lady, and make your plans ; for as sure's you're a living woman the cheque will be in your hands to-morrow, in your bank, if you'll tell me the name of it."

"I can cut them all—all ! I have my beggarly income ; but your money will take me out of this for ever."

She spoke savagely below her breath, and her eyes flashed into her girlhood's beauty.

"Bella Torridge !" she cried out, "there's more true gold in your heart than in the mint itself."

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

A man's business is the vital spark of his brain.

DICK HEENE settled in Portchester Gardens on his return from Southshire. Maurice Darley chose the rooms and advised arrangements, as one who understood "inclusives" and their vagaries, and the rough-and-ready housekeeping a man must master, even with the best intentioned of landladies.

Darley was looking out for a studio with a bunk in the roof to supply his own needs; but Dick insisted he should remain with him till the New Year was well in.

They were both glad when Christmas was over, for, though by no means lonely—the hospitality of friends settled in London prevented any homesickness—they wanted to get to work in their several ways.

The men who knew Darley in his student days and rated his talent high were generous in encouragement, and he was of the type that can endure anything in a congenial atmosphere.

Heene found his London agent in a little cockloft of an office that looked mean to Australian ideas; he immediately sought something more suitable to the expansion of a business. City rents were staggering. After the first shock he saw that the £50,000 at his back was nothing out of the way as a scaffolding.

In the New Year he settled on two first-floor rooms in Gracechurch Street at a rental of £500 per annum; bought out a man's furniture that met his views;

engaged a clerk, an office-boy, and a typist; then unfolded his wares.

His first step was to set inquiries on foot concerning the rival firm of Robert Falcott & Co., who were handling the fibre. Who or what Falcott was nobody knew. Falcott was not spoken of as a power. He was agent for several other commodities, with an office in the Minories and a New York address.

He was pointed out to Dick, a scrupulously attired man of middle age, good-looking though of dull countenance, and evidently holding himself as one of importance.

But he did not seem to be making any active progress with the fibre.

Heene's method was that of all young countries, to seek out every man of influence likely to impress his fellow-men, and get him interested. Before a week was out he discovered to his chagrin that Englishmen are, of all races, the hardest to approach in dealing with anything new. They resent the new-comer; in some instances they suspect him.

They commence by shaking their heads and pointing out the existing state of the market as unsatisfactory for the reception of new material. No matter what the material may be, from wine to wool, silk to soap, the argument is always the same. Probably Noah originated it when he got safely grounded on Mount Ararat.

Then another little characteristic of the English merchant is his jealousy of any man in the same line of business as himself. Dick found that he must maintain rigid silence concerning the firms with whom he was negotiating. To an Australian this was depressing.

The exception is the travelled merchant whose mind has been widened by observation of the world's large centres, who throws his mental force on everyone in his employment, so that his business increases seemingly by good fortune when it is the actual power of the man

himself. His principle is to turn competitors to use by watching their methods.

Among the younger men whose acquaintance Heene made were several who voiced their opinions with no uncertain note about the various aspects of trade. Sometimes they looked him up in his rooms in the evening, or invited him to their clubs and haunts.

The conversation turned once on commercial morality, and the son of an Eastern banker known from London to Yokohama made a statement that caused hot discussion.

"My father was often asked how he placed the nations viewed from the standpoint of commercial morality. He held that there was one first, only one, the Chinaman every time."

A howl of protest ending in laughter ensued.

"Where does the Englishman come in?"

"A poor third, if not fourth; the French second; the Swiss third, with perhaps the English equal; America next."

"And Germany?"

"It is a moot question whether Germany takes the lowest place or whether that honour is reserved for the Jap."

"That reminds me," said Heene, "I've a friend who was nearly had by the Japs over some horses they wanted to buy for the war, some thousands it ran into, on p.o.d. terms. We advised him to get the money down in Australia, as no one had ever heard of a foreigner winning a case in jolly Japan. So the horses were never bought and shipped."

"Yes, the Chinaman is good," said Burston, who was present; "but the first in my opinion, in my dealings, is the Austrian Jew settled in America. For friendliness, absolute fairness, and cheerful help, and never a squeal on a deal that goes against him, the Austrian-American-Jew is the topnotcher."

The young men raised their eyebrows at this positive

statement. Before their incredulity could find expression in a sneer, Burston continued, as a man believing in his own experience :

“ I challenge that about Americans. In New York I met a big man to whom I was anxious to sell some stuff. He refused, had stuff that satisfied him already, didn't care to change, and so forth ; but he added, ‘ Still, even if I can't deal with you, I may be able to put you on the track of somebody else. Come over the road and I'll introduce you to So-and-So,’ his rival in the same line. I was amazed. ‘ What ! You'll take me to a competitor and recommend me ? ’ ‘ Why not ? I can't buy your stuff, and you're bound to find him anyhow, so I may as well help. There is really no gain in keeping you from a competitor. I know what he pays for his raw material ; he knows what I pay. I know what wages he pays ; he ditto. I know what he sells his finished goods at, again ditto ; but there's one thing he does *not* know, and that is my process in manufacturing. Nor do I know his secrets. That is where our brains count against one another. Nothing else matters. Come along.’ And I did business.”

Burston was making satisfactory progress with his mercerizing process, and in communication with Raban Heene. Success seemed certain, but there was a difficulty. The fibre lost its peculiar quality for durability in the effort to gain a lasting sheen ; and to negative this, Burston was experimenting continually.

“ Mercerized stuff is far honester than Germanized silk,” he told Heene, “ with its forty per cent. of salts of tin, and gloss of ground glass and mica. I know one of your Melbourne firms who were caught by that tin adulteration, giving the order for the sample supplied in perfect good faith, and also selling in good faith. Within a month the purchasers of that ‘ silk ’ were swarming round the shop with samples of its wear. The material had split and cut hopelessly. Such a

bobbery as never was. But the firm made good every order, allowing customers full value for defective purchase, and they dropped the German house for evermore. We must make our mercerized fibre absolutely strong and reliable."

A disquieting discovery came to light in a letter from the Continental agents in Paris, with whom Heene Limited had already opened negotiations, Thrae & Enish.

We are taking samples from Falcott & Co. Their quotations are lower than yours, and the fibre of the same strength. . . .

"How did Falcott get hold of them?" cogitated Dick.

It was extraordinary that two men trying to put the same material on the market should settle on the same Continental agents.

This was a set-back that acted like a spur and made Dick redouble his energies. A promise here and a "think of it" there heartened him up, and the Agent-General arranged an introduction to an army man of note.

The next step was to gain the publicity of the Press. As this was largely a matter of advertising, and receiving notices in return, time did not hang on his hands.

An odd incident happened. Heene found a man's sleeve-link on his desk one afternoon, a ruby set in a sovereign. Inquiries could not discover the owner. The office was never left without someone in charge, and though there might be several callers, they could generally be located. But nobody would go the length of sitting at a desk, especially when it was closed. Yet there the sleeve-link was near the edge of the blotting-pad. Dick was confident he had closed the desk when he went out.

Then Miss May, the typist, gave notice. Yes, the

salary was satisfactory ; the billet all right ; the work easy, but—the girl compressed her lips and looked confused.

“ I don’t want to make upsets in an office,” she said ; “ but likely as not I’ll be blamed if anything goes wrong. So rather than play the sneak, I’m off.”

“ That you’re not. You’ve got to be businesslike enough to supply an explanation. If you know something that is against the venture that I am trying to fix up, you should speak out.”

She hesitated.

“ Come, my good girl. What on earth do you want to sack yourself for ? ”

“ It’s just this. I’ve come in three times from my lunch and found no one here. It was arranged that I went to lunch first ; but Bannon made some excuse every time, and the boy’s not been here either.”

“ I’m much obliged to you for telling me, and please think no more about leaving. Nor shall I mention what you have told me.”

He suspected the clerk of playing into the hands of the enemy, and became watchful.

The clerk was not in the pay of the enemy but in the clutch of a gambling mania, like scores of others of his type.

“ I’ll give you another chance,” said Dick, when he made the discovery. “ Only one, mind, for unless you pull yourself together now, you’ll be without the grip to do it later.”

Fate sent him a guardian angel, or so he liked to think, in the shape of a little terrier, starved and muddy and miserable, that crept after him in the way dogs are attracted to a possible protector.

Dick did not notice the poor shivering creature following up the stairs, and crouching nervously in the darkest corner of the landing. The dog took courage and pushed his sharp nose through the open door, smelt the warmth of a fire and slunk in fearfully. Instead of

making for the fire—he had been ousted from more than one fire that day—he sniffed about for the boots he had followed, and locating them in the inner office, pattered across and announced his presence with a whimper.

“Hullo! Where did you spring from?” said Dick.

The dog answered with another whimper and as much hope as he could express in the wagging of his tail, creeping nearer by inches, with his humid eyes fixed on the face he was trying to propitiate.

The remains of a stale sandwich lay in its wrapping on the desk, and Dick threw it into the fender.

“Take it!”

The terrier sprang frantically after the food and in one gulp devoured paper and all.

“Poor little brute!”

Dick looked at his teeth. He was a young dog, a pitiable object in his mud and shivering misery; but the head and forepaws suggested utility as a ratter. He reminded Dick of the first dog he had owned as a boy and trained to cleverness.

“I’ll keep him. I want something of the kind. With his sharp nose about the place there could be no more prowling after desks and documents. I’ll start his education at once.” Miss May, the typist, was astonished by a demand for biscuits.

Then the dog received his first lesson. Hunger had deadened his wits; he did not know what was expected of him; but with the third biscuit he began to see a connection between food and the word of command.

“Your name is Snuff!” Dick kept one hand on the dog’s neck and threw a fragment to the other side of the room. “Snuff, fetch it!”

Snuff bounded off, swallowed the morsel, and came back for more, his eyes perceptibly brighter. He soon understood that he was not to get the food until the word of command was given.

“ When he’s washed and had a day or two’s grub, he’ll not look so bad. Lie there and go to sleep.”

The dog settled by the fire, not to sleep at first, as if he feared that this haven might be transient, but crouched with his head on his forepaws, until the warmth of the fire made him coil up in peace.

Dick took his new friend home and made provision for him, taught him how to guard his gloves, bag, and hat, and from starved wretchedness the dog emerged well shaped, keen eyed and trusty.

On clear mornings Dick walked to his business with Snuff at his heels ; sometimes they journeyed together on the roof of a bus ; occasionally Snuff was left all night on guard at the office, when his delight at meeting his benefactor in the morning could be heard in the street below.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

The outer edge of a mystery is more enthralling than the inner explanation.

ONE morning Torridge appeared at the office.

"Come to say good-bye," he announced. "Going back. Bell and me's had enough of this place. Nothing but the same gloomy old grey sky from one month to another ; no other sort of sky in stock in England. Cold and slush, and beastly cough lozenges."

The stalwart little red man summed up his English experience so dolefully that Heene laughed.

"Come and lunch with me."

"No, I came here to ask you. Bell's outside in a taxi."

Dick liked his fellow-passenger, and it was not their first lunch together. Mrs. Torridge was shivering under some handsome furs, though the winter did not affect her spirits.

"If Ben was Lord Mayor of London now, d'you know what I'd make him do?" she greeted Heene. "I'd make him have fires in every street so all who wanted could have a warm. That would be a sight better than Lord Mayor's dinners and turtle soup."

"I agree with you," he laughed.

They chose a restaurant in the Strand, and were scarcely seated when Torridge exclaimed:

"Hallo, there's our friend!"

Heene glanced in the direction indicated and saw the "Louis d'Or" at lunch with Robert Falcott.

The widow Merch noticed the newcomers and continued talking, evidently challenging admiration.

"Always a string to her bow."

Dick felt in a predicament. He remembered talking of his affairs to the "Louis d'Or." She had seen him address an envelope to Thrae & Enish on the boat, and had commented on the name.

Could she have given the name to Falcott? How did she know Falcott? There was no secrecy about the nature of Heene's business. Everybody on the boat could have learnt what it was, were they so minded.

Feeling sure of Torridge's reliability, he outlined the matter to him. The talk drifted to Southshire and shattered illusions.

"I just ached for a sight of the old place again," said Torridge, "like lots of other men who's made their pile but won't dare own it. With all this striving and shoving to get on, a man's afraid to say he's humbly born."

"It's because of their wives and families," put in Bella. "The mothers have to scratch round to find edible husbands for their daughters, and get 'em settled, small blame to 'em, and the boys have to be set up."

"Yes, too much eddication. Youngsters'd value it better if they had to get it themselves. I learnt myself all I know."

There was an epitome of a hard-fought career in the last sentence.

"I dare say you know as much as the best of us."

"I do. Perhaps not grammar, but other things more necessary."

"Arter all, Gawd doesn't mind bad grammar," said his helpmeet consolingly.

"If you ask me the best book for a chap to learn out of," Torridge went on, "I would say it is the Old Testament."

"You mean from a religious point of view?" asked Dick surprised.

"No, indeed. From a purely commercial. Just you study the Old Testament for business, for there's no game them old Jewish kings weren't up to. What they didn't know wasn't worth knowing. That's how I learnt how to keep my weather-eye open."

He went on to particularize some of the "games" that took his fancy for rascality, and Dick listened amused, wondering, too, at the keenness of brain that saw parallels with modern frauds.

"Will you do something for me, Torridge?" he asked, as a sudden thought struck him.

"Glad to."

"I mean when you return to Melbourne. Call on Mrs. Ireton, Mrs. Diss that was, and tell her all that we have been discussing in connection with Engadee and Merch. I have already written advising her to set her lawyers going, but with you on the spot——"

"Consider it done. I'll help start the ferrets."

"You're a good chap. There's something more. Now listen, for this is what I've found out down in Southshire, at Engledree. Merch must have seen the place on his trip to England and copied it. I suppose it took his fancy and he simplified the name to give it a native sound."

Dick described his visit and the secret recess in the banister, but he concealed his feelings regarding any supernatural urging.

"I'll go and have a look at Engadee, blest if I don't," interrupted Torridge. "I'll pretend I'm on for a deal."

"Do. And pay particular attention to these banisters. They are oak. I noticed that and thought it extravagant, as the wood must have cost him something."

Torridge's blue eyes grew keen.

"You think Merch hid important papers?"

"I am sure he did, a deed or a document."

"But since he was spending another's money, it's much more likely he would destroy any damaging evidence. What reason could he have for keeping it?"

"He may have lacked courage to destroy it for one thing, or conscience might have given him a jab. Or—or——"

Dick flushed, but conquering his hesitation, continued:

"Neither you, nor I, nor any mortal man, can say what strange forces are at work in influencing things that seem contradictory. My belief is that the better part of his nature asserted itself and that he meant some time or other to make amends. Perhaps he felt he couldn't trust *her* and tried to set matters right, but was too avaricious to part with the property during his lifetime. And now the better part of him still lives on, trying to atone for what was evil."

"Maybe," assented Torridge, with unusual softness. "They do say the place is haunted. D'you think Steve Merch is his own ghost?"

"Yes."

"Lor! You give me the creeps," commented Bella. "I mind now of a case where a ghost named Fisher used to sit on a fence near where he was murdered, and helped to discover his murderer. It's a fact—up Bendigo way it was."

They laughed, but Torridge nodded a steady acquiescence. Dick felt that he had acted wisely.

The practical little man did not return so soon as he contemplated. The Mayor of Locker Gully was not lacking honour out of his own country, as well as in it, and there were enough of his compatriots in London to give him a welcome.

Several of their good ladies, it is true, made fun of the mayoress and feared to exhibit her to their English friends, for women as a body have not yet emancipated themselves from conventional notions of the fitness of

things. Yet there were a few who were proud of their country, and valued those who took part in welding it together, be they men or women, so that Bella Torridge made some friends and began to think England was not such a bad place after all.

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

A mollusc married a microbe
In the palæolithic age ;
They dwelt in a rock
With a zoophyte stock,
And thus advanced a stage.

A million years of mating
Developed a human trend ;
But the mollusc strain
With the microbe brain
Was limpet to the end.

ENGADEE became a secondary matter to Dick, because of the demands of his own business.

Though many firms were expressing interest, no large institution had come within the range of his activities. This was a potential element in the success of the marine fibre. Dick did not waste his time on relatively unimportant bodies ; but set his cap at the foremost—Proxy House.

Proxy House is the hardest place in all England to enter, for its threshold is of time-worn tradition, and its doors are swayed by triple lethargy.

Of its inner working no man knows, least of all those within its walls, for its stillness is that of Eternity. Not even the footfall of Time leaves any impression.

In its departments lie all the keys of the Universe, with the mysteries of Heaven and Earth locked up in japanned boxes, in cupboards that close automatically and never open again.

Theoretically there is a clerk to every key ; but though the key is too big for the clerk at first, it ends by the clerk being too big for the key.

The Proxy House code of rules is formulated on a broken tablet claimed to belong to the Medes and Persians. Its blanks and its breakages have been restored by the attrition of many minds.

Proxy House has an accent of its own, just as it has a manner of its own. It even grows old by a method of its own development by never looking young. Its officials never die. They disappear and their successors are chosen from facial resemblance to the late departed.

They begin on a special training by saying the alphabet backwards, practising deep breathing between each letter. The longer the breath and the slower the enunciation the better the chance of a career.

Clamped bands are in use to prevent any too active brain manifestation ; only one kind of arithmetic is required, the rule of three. As all the affairs of life are reducible to rule of three in the mind of Proxy House, the rule of three suffices, with a possible equation, which has the merit of a creed. Thus : Proxy House equals heaven and earth *plus* all things therein.

Written communications from the outer world are disinfected, fumigated, placed in the hot air chamber to scorch the microbes of meaning out of them, then dropped in the refrigerating vaults to cool. No letter is forgotten. It must go through this process before it can be answered. The outer world may grumble at the delay in receiving an answer ; but this is inconsistent, seeing that Proxy House is accepted as a British bulwark.

The younger countries with their impetuous idea of business would tear the place down. An Englishman makes a friend of the doormat. There is no doormat in the whole world that has held the dust of so many feet ; heard the creak of impatience in so many boots.

Grumblers, too, complain of being snubbed, of being

made to sing small, of being shunted, but surely this is all very English. The Englishman allows himself to be overawed by his own institutions. Yet they are there for his benefit. He pays the salaries, the very coals come out of his pocket, even the bus fares of the officials ; while he has not the heart of a mouse to assert himself.

Dick Heene, warned by the experience of others, girded himself for battle.

He wrote to the Secretary of the Overseas Department, and because he did not receive an answer after a week called to know why.

But the janitor objected to his going anywhere or seeing anyone unless he stated his business. Dick declared "Imperial business" in such a fire-eating voice that the uniformed individual hastily retreated. Dick marched past him down a corridor to where another uniform stood with a human stuffing in it.

"The Overseas Department," he said truculently, again modelling his tone on that of a bushranger. An inert hand was pointed to the right.

"Up the stairs : Room 100A."

There were more uniforms upstairs, but the life had gone out of them, for their sole calling was to carry long blue paper and envelopes from one department to another.

"Room 100A" was not easy to find because it was a tacked-on department, only created by circumstances too strong to be resisted, even by the laws of Proxy House. By rights it should be next 100, but it was compelled to take its chance anywhere and be thankful for a corner on a landing between 70 and 71.

As Dick could not locate it next 100 he asked no questions but perambulated the passages, looking at each door. It saved time.

When he discovered the tablet with the number he did not knock. He walked in with an air of assurance, thereby startling the only inmate of the room into such

bolt uprightness that it looked as if it were managed by machinery. He gazed at the intruder from sublime altitudes.

"I wish to see the Secretary of the Overseas Department." A long pause ensued. Dick repeated his desire, somewhat put out by the sustained, fixed, unwinking gaze. Only long years of practice could achieve that gaze. It was mutely understood to be the test of competence at Proxy House which led to promotion. Therefore everybody practised it from the bassinette stage upwards.

"I wish to see the Secretary of the Overseas Department."

"This is not his office."

"Then why on earth couldn't you say so at first? Where is his office?"

"If you will inquire of the corridor messenger he will direct you."

"Why was I directed here to 100A? Is not this the Overseas office?"

"It is one of the annexes."

The words came as slowly as if they were doled out of a penny-in-the-slot machine. Dick almost heard the click of the mechanism.

"Do you have anything to do with Australian affairs in this—annexe?"

Absolute silence. The machine had stuck, but the gaze remained the same. Dick Heene had that gaze in his dreams for years to come. It exasperated him; with difficulty he smothered an expletive.

"Would you mind answering my question if it isn't too much trouble? Have you anything to do with Australian affairs in this annexe?"

"If you will write your business it will be attended to in due course."

Dick groaned and flung out. The door closed automatically; the official subsided in the same fashion.

A figure in uniform stood like a statue near a window. Dick judged him to be the corridor messenger.

"I want to find the Chief of the Overseas Department. If you'll take me there I'll give you half a crown."

In the man's lifeless eyes a light gleamed for a second, then died out.

"I'm sorry, sir, but I may not leave this floor."

Dick Heene's next remarks were of the kind that keep archangels busy—in blotting out, because of the provocation that prompted them.

"Evidently the d——d place is on another floor. I'll find it if I have to sleep on the premises."

He meant to dangle a half-sovereign before the next corridor messenger; but as he descended the stairs something in uniform slid down the banisters, a human object with trousered legs and heels in the air. The heels came against Dick with a whack. He saw a face upside down, and through the railings, the owner of the face balancing himself on his stomach in his descent.

Dick caught the nearest heel and arrested progress. The apparition was an office boy of some kind; but even he had the Proxy House gaze.

"I want the Chief of the Overseas Department. Take me there and I'll give you a shilling."

To his relief the boy was human after all.

"Make it two, mister, cos I have to halve it with my pal below. He'll take you there. It's at the back, and this is my beat."

"Very good. Only hurry up. Where is your pal?"

The youngster gained an upright position, but did not otherwise bestir himself. He descended the stairs as if to his doom, and gurgled forth a choking cry of comradeship. A similar cry was gurgled back, and a second edition of himself appeared.

"Take this gemman to the Chee-O-C, and he'll give you a bob. Gimme mine now, sir."

The incident restored Dick's good humour, and he handed over the coin.

"This way, sir," said the new youth patronizingly. He walked with great swagger through various ramifications to an outer building.

"There you are, sir."

"Which door?"

"They're all Chee-O-C."

He took his shilling without comment and disappeared.

Dick tried the first door and found three gentlemen in beautifully fitting suits, with their combined gaze on him.

"Is this the Chief of the Overseas Department?"

Not one of them replied. The nearest touched an electric bell. Another elegantly clad gentleman appeared in answer; the one who had touched the bell gave a covert sign by glancing at Dick Heene. Then the first three turned away, leaving Number Four on duty.

"Is this the Chief of the Overseas Department?"

Dick felt the question growing to his tongue with repetition.

"Under what initial?" asked Number Four.

"Initial? Oh, I see. My name's Heene, and my business is in connection with an Australian product."

"Australia is the third door to the right."

"Thank you."

"I'm getting warmer," thought Dick, as he turned the next handle. The interior looked more hopeful, as a map of Australia was on the wall; but the gaze of the occupants, only two this time, was as blank as before.

"I want to see the head of the Overseas Department?"

Several seconds passed before an answer was vouchsafed.

"By appointment?"

"I have already written to him."

"On what business?"

" I wish to bring under his notice a new Australian commodity, and have asked for an interview."

" Has he promised an interview ? "

" I have not yet received an answer to my letter written over a week ago. That is why I am here."

They showed no interest. Their gaze remained unblinking, unemotional. Dick had the sense to see he must preserve his equanimity.

" Will you kindly take my card to him ? "

He held out a card, but neither offered to touch it. He might have been the doomed Vanderdecken holding out a letter to the frightened sailors.

" Perhaps it isn't in your province to take a card," said Dick in a smooth voice. " But you *may* be able to point out the way ? Or I could take it myself for that matter. Through this door, I presume ? "

This really frightened them, and both unconsciously made a step to bar his advance.

" It would be no use taking your card unless an appointment has been made."

" I have already written for an appointment, over a week ago, but as no answer has come I am here to make inquiries."

" An answer will reach you in due course."

" What do you call ' in due course ' ? "

They clearly regarded him now as some inferior object unworthy of tolerance.

" Your letter is probably one of many and cannot be attended to out of its turn."

" I can quite understand that. But allowing for the many thousands of letters your words imply, a week is an unduly long time to wait. Moreover, it is unbusinesslike. This office was inaugurated in the interests of the Australian Commonwealth ; its officials draw their salaries for such work as they do because of the commercial relations arising out of the overseas trade. As an Australian merchant I object most strongly to the dilatory methods and indifference to which I

personally have been subjected. It would be better to wipe out the whole office and start afresh with a staff who can take a conscientious, and it is not too much to ask, an intelligent interest in their work. Perhaps it is not too late to do that. There is my card, Richard Heene, of Heene Limited, Melbourne, Sydney and Adelaide. My business has already been stated in my letter. I hope to receive an answer before my second time on earth. Good morning."

Utterly sick of Proxy House, Dick returned to his own office, walking every step of the way to work off the spleen.

As a matter of fact a month passed before he received an answer to his letter, to say its contents had been duly noted and would receive attention in due course. By that time other issues had opened.

CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

Smiles were born before sneers.

IN emphasizing the merits of the marine fibre Dick did not trust to mere statement. He provided ocular and tangible proof. As this proof was of the most varied character, it of necessity should be always on view, so that the outer office in Gracechurch Street looked like the packing annexe to an exhibition.

Commercial London, that is the small section awake to the value of a new product, regarded it as an exhibition, came to see, touch, discuss, also disparage, for nothing new was ever put on the London market without a prophecy of failure.

If someone with plenty of leisure and a turn for compilation collected together the cocksure croakings that have preceded successes in commerce, there would be no greater volume of romance in the whole world.

Half a century ago a poem found favour among teachers to impress the parts of speech on children :

Mrs. Grammar once gave a fine ball
To the nine different parts of our speech,
The big and the small, the short and the tall,
There were pies and plum puddings for each.
At first the little articles came
In a hurry to make themselves known,
Fat "A," "An" and "The," but none of the three
Could stand for a minute alone.

The nouns, adjectives, pronouns, verbs, and so forth, followed to the festivity, but the fun ended in a rout, for—

There pounced in at once

A monster—a dunce !

Who confounded the nine parts of speech.

Not one dunce, but many, came to confound the marine fibre. Or perhaps it was the one dunce who brought his kith and kin, like the lonely devil in the Scriptures, who went away to hunt up seven congenial devils for company. He was very human, that devil.

So it was with the *Posidonia Australis*.

Upholsterers prodded the couch stuffed with the fibre ; bed manufacturers thumped the cushions and pulled the mattress ; makers of sacking in all its varieties compared the score of graded bags of which the fibre was sole constituent, from a flour bag to a wool pack or a corn sack.

There were ropes in a hundred thicknesses from clothes lines to cables ; twine, string and binding thread, as fine as they were coarse ; saddles, stuffed with the fibre, brought their particular observers ; men whose trade was in plaster saw how the material could be made a substitute for cow's hair.

Then the great packing fraternity were shown how this very same material could be utilized in protecting perishable products, with the added merit of being practically a non-conductor and of very low inflammability.

One of the exhibits was a huge chest thickly wadded on the outside with the fibre, and with the door similarly insulated to illustrate a cool chamber, the fibre taking the place of wool.

The few women who came lingered longest over an article nobody had ever heard of—a hay-box. This was a cooking apparatus, well known in Norway and other European countries, a large wooden case firmly stuffed with the fibre, and showing the nest where the

cooking pot should rest. Dick was called on for continual explanation. It was really the idea of Miss May, the typist, who learnt of the hay-box from a Swedish friend, and packed one at Dick's suggestion. To attest its working order she made some wonderful beef tea on it for the benefit of visitors.

Beside this a boiler was in position with fibre lagging. It excited keen comment because of the extreme lightness as compared with the much heavier asbestos.

Nor were scientific minds allowed to go hungry away, for a section of submarine cable was shown encased in the fibre instead of oakum.

"Eh! Mon!" exclaimed a Scotch shipbuilder, surprised at the use the stuff could be put in caulking decks and the woodwork of ships, but he shook his head disbelievingly at the array of papier-mâché articles. That one product of a far-away shore could achieve all these wonders of utility made him blink. It savoured of the black art. Yet there were greater marvels.

Magnates of the printing world shot out their lips over the samples of paper. One or two of the more astute spirits made cautious inquiries.

Carpet and linoleum firms were equally sceptical, notwithstanding the evidence of their eyes. That a substance which could take the place of cork dust in the manufacture of linoleum was of equal importance in producing woven floor fabrics suggested too much magic for everyday life. The statement was an advertisement. It could not be grasped at first sight, especially in face of another claim for the fibre—that it was capable of taking any dye readily, vegetable or aniline.

The office walls were hung with photographs and prints illustrating every stage in the history of the product. From a long sweep of seashore illustrating the beds at low tide, there were other views showing

the dredging apparatus, trollies racing up and down the little pier at Pointer Bay, packers at work in the storehouse, bales ready for shipment overseas, employés busy grading, and finally the fibre in course of manufacture into textile material.

A vigorous crayon drawing by an Australian artist was entitled "Before the Dawn of Civilization," a stretch of fibre-clad coast with sea-birds circling overhead and nature quiescent. The companion sketch, "Man's Mastery," was the same scene with a dredging boat at work.

The hundreds of eyes that scrutinized the exhibition found something to acclaim and yet something to cavil at, because the Englishman who has dealt in one commodity all his life is as hard to move as a rock.

The array of army blankets hung tapestry fashion on the walls brought together a non-committal jury whose verdict was as veering as a weathercock.

Perhaps of all the articles on view none created so much criticism as the transformation of the fibre into cloth by means of the admixture of wool, and this without special machinery.

There were tweeds and serges and flannels and other fabrics inviting that most delicate of all tests, the sense of touch. Amongst experts only the very highest possess that marvellous accuracy of finger-tip which detects and distinguishes the various grades of wool, or the proportion of cotton in wool, in such a way as to be infallible, just as certain palates are renowned for their test of tea.

These men held no doubts as to the future of the *Posidonia Australis*. It was the coming fabric for clothing purposes. Whether it had a fight or not was just a matter for the trade. The trade hummed and hawed and looked on askance, for the trade hates anything new, or anything that tends to unsettle the market.

Dick issued his invitations freely, but found it difficult

to secure a response in anything like the degree his venture demanded, or so he considered.

He was assured that never before was such widespread curiosity evinced over anything new.

A keen-witted pressman whispered what was lacking.

“Get some bigwig to give a nod over it. The British public must have a leader ; it can’t formulate an idea of its own. Get a leader, get a leader !”

Dick set out to get a leader.

CHAPTER THIRTY

The Empire's spirit is rooted in hearts of oak, yet thistle-down may carry it on the wings of the wind.

THE Agent-General's letter of introduction pointed to the very man, Colonel Leeward, who was reputed to have great say in Army matters.

This important personage could not be seen at once, as he was understood to be visiting Aldershot. A certain mystery clung to his movements, for which the Australian did not see the necessity, save on the ground that this was the way of an Englishman in high office.

Eventually an appointment was made and Dick waited on Colonel Leeward, not allowing himself to hope too much, though determined to extract some profit from the interview.

Agreeably to his expectations the military star was urbane, soft-voiced even, with a sad inflection of speech and a delicate emphasis in pronouncing his " ings " and " eds " that might have belonged to a squire of dames.

He listened with attention and asked questions in a mournful tone, as if the sorrow of the venture was more apparent to him than its utility. More than once he sighed dismally, and Dick felt uneasy lest his visit was ill-timed.

Yet save the melancholy there was no hint of impatience in the great man's manner.

It was hard to understand how that sad-toned voice

could have given martial orders. The Australian wondered if it were a pose. Presently a gleam of comprehension came.

Colonel Leeward was so beset with people exploiting this or that person or place or commodity that he developed a habit of being deprecatory to everyone who came near him. A naturally courteous manner was smoothed down to a dead level of dejected utterances calculated to kill any kind of hope in the human breast.

To hear his dulcet speech was like securing the helpful interest of an archangel, but his comments in a perceptibly descending minor scale of mournfulness aroused thoughts of suicide.

"I am afraid I can be of no use to you, Mr. Heene," he said sighing. "I admit this new material has remarkable qualities, but all new materials have remarkable qualities. If they came up to a quarter of what is claimed for them there would be a revolution in every department."

"Well, why shouldn't there be a revolution, if you will pardon the question?" was Dick's quiet rejoinder. "It is revolutions of this kind that gladden the soul of the true business man. They give him his chance."

Colonel Leeward drew down the corners of his mouth and smiled sadly.

"You misunderstand my meaning. It is the failure of new products to achieve what is claimed for them that make men in my position chary of taking up any new commodity."

"That I can well understand. But—again asking you to pardon my questioning—don't you consider it your province or rather, I should say, your privilege, as a man in position, to investigate the merits of a new product instead of assuming it to be a disappointment?"

Again the same wan smile. Colonel Leeward really looked distressed at the insistent hopefulness of this Australian.

"I could scarcely go into the merits of everything,

Mr. Heene. Sometimes I see twenty people in a day, each with something that combines the qualities of a latter-day miracle with the characteristics of practical efficiency more pronounced than anything that has preceded it since the world began."

The delicate, refined voice had fallen to such depths of woe that it did not seem possible for the speaker ever to see another ray of gladness in the universe. But Dick kept his courage up and did not allow the ring of conviction to drop from his utterance. It is this ring of conviction that is the business man's "Open Sesame."

"I am not claiming anything miraculous for the fibre, just steady, workable qualities that will ensure abundant satisfaction for what it costs. In my office in Gracechurch Street I have a complete exhibition——"

"I never go to such things," put in Colonel Leeward hastily, then with an added note of mournfulness, "I have not the time."

"Of course not, but may I bring some of them here?"

"Eh?" Colonel Leeward forgot his sadness at his visitor's go-ahead methods. "What could you bring here apart from what you have already shown me?"

"The whole exhibition if need be," answered Dick pleasantly. The Army authority realized that this son of the Southern Cross had come to stay.

"If you mention an hour when you would be absent," continued Dick, "I would bring the things here and arrange them for your inspection at your own convenience. If you would kindly give me a second appointment I could discuss each article with you. Seeing's believing," he added: "I make no sort of hesitation in showing I want your help more than I want anything on earth just now."

The quiet persistence was not without its effect, but no man in the position of a personage likes to yield easily, otherwise he would have yielded at first.

"I cannot see what purpose would be served. I can do nothing."

"Supposing for the moment I accept that answer, you must allow me to put a very personal question—quite apart from your official views—do you take no interest in a commodity such as I offer? As a private individual are you utterly indifferent to its merits?"

Colonel Leeward found himself in a cleft stick. It would never do to say "No." If he said "Yes" he was at the mercy of the exploiter.

"If you only knew how often that question has been put to me," he said diplomatically, reverting to his drooping smile.

"Not often enough to kill your intelligent interest in new commodities, I trust. May I not submit the samples to your notice?"

"If you care to go to the trouble, but understand it can lead to nothing."

"Always excepting your own interest as a man willing to note new things and keep abreast of the times."

Colonel Leeward shook his head sorrowfully and raised his eyebrows.

"At what hour will you be absent so that I may bring the things here and arrange them?" persisted Dick deferentially.

"I leave at five o'clock."

"Would it be intruding too much on your courtesy to ask you to give instructions for my admittance?"

Finding himself cornered Colonel Leeward took out a card and wrote a few words on it. This he gave to Dick.

"You can make your arrangements with the janitor."

That was how Dick Heene transferred his exhibition from Gracechurch Street to Colonel Leeward's sanctum the very same afternoon. It took the intervening hours to get it packed on a large motor lorry in readiness for

transit. At a quarter past five it was being placed in position, with Dick working in his shirt sleeves; his office staff helping him in delight, including Miss May, the typist, who gave a feminine touch to the grouping and attended to the dusting when everything was complete.

Seven o'clock struck long before they were done, very hot though it was February, very hopeful and very hungry. Dick took them all out to dinner with him.

Next morning, Colonel Leeward, in part forgetfulness of the previous day's visitor, did not recognize his own office.

The walls were tapestried with army blankets and serges and cloths, while festoons of rope of every imaginable grade formed a neat cameo effect over the material. There was a pyramid of army saddles and such like; a strip of linoleum on the floor and lengths of carpet to flank it; a divan in one corner held mattress and cushions; in short, the Gracechurch Street exhibition was making the most of its seat amongst the mighty. Yet everything was not only neat but arranged in good taste, even to the insulated chest and the boiler.

Colonel Leeward came as near having a fit as ever he did in his life, only he never allowed himself to be surprised enough for fits. He stood staring and forgot to be sorrowful. For a minute the all-British expletive hovered on his tongue, then his eyebrows went up and the humour that was crushed down under twenty years' load of officialdom flickered into vitality.

"Well, I'm blessed!" he muttered. He looked at the exhibition, spent half an hour over it, the quickest-going half-hour he had spent for many a day.

Then Mr. Richard Heene was announced and Colonel Leeward screwed his face to sorrow once more.

"You've gone to considerable trouble, Mr. Heene," he said.

"I would go to twenty times more trouble to win your good opinion," replied the Australian.

"You rate me too highly," protested the Englishman, and it seemed as if it were difficult to get the customary deprecating droop back to the corners of his mouth.

"Have you had time to glance round?" asked Dick.

"Ye—es. There is plenty to interest; more than a glance round is necessary, and my time is much occupied."

"Oh, the stuff can remain here a week or a month," said Dick cheerfully. "Just as long as it suits your convenience."

"Do you think I care to have my office turned into a lumber room for a month?"

"Oh, if it appears only lumber in your eyes I'll take it away at once. In bringing it under your notice I was trying to gain the good opinion of a discerning authority in such matters. Surely, sir, you'll admit that anyone working for a new industry is working for the Empire and the Empire's necessities——"

"Oh, spare me that!" ejaculated the discerning authority. "I hear it every hour of the day."

"Then I substitute Australia for Empire. I am working for my country, as well as for myself and for my firm, and England has a right to help her children. If a highly-placed person like you, sir, objects to be bothered, then good-bye to any hopes of advancing a young country's interests. But I am bound to say it is an ungracious attitude to assume, when England has only to hold up her little finger for Australia to fly to her aid, and, if necessary, to help her to the last man and the last shilling."

Colonel Leeward shifted in his chair uneasily.

"You have got right away from the main question, Mr. Heene. You allow your zeal to run away with you. I can assure you Australia is thoroughly appreciated in this country."

"Then give me some decided proof of it. That's all I ask. Here am I, a member of a leading merchant firm, bent on establishing a market with a first-class commodity, useful in a score of different ways. It is in your province to help me ; you are where you are, sir, for that purpose. You hold your position from an Imperial point of view, yet you adopt the *laissez-faire* policy of the man in the street. You refuse to be bothered."

"I do *not* refuse to be bothered."

The soldier spoke now, for Colonel Leeward felt a slur on his honour. Sorrowful cadences and smiles went to the winds ; he stood squarely with a flash in his eyes at the audacity of a speech certainly no applicant for his intercession had ever made before.

"You refuse to give any time for inspection ; what is that but refusing to be bothered ? If my words appear blunt and hurt your refined feelings, accept my apology, but I have only spoken the thoughts I have no wish to conceal."

"If you wish to succeed you must learn to suppress a too vigorous speech."

"In England, perhaps, and only in official England, where one should work by a code for fear of being too expressive. But the outer world demands a wider language. Yet if we of the younger nations court the market of the outer world, England is the first to cry out. England demands first pick and first choice, but she'll not bestir herself to secure them, and grumbles when the trade drifts elsewhere."

"I have no time to enter on a discussion of this kind, Mr. Heene."

"Precisely. You refuse to be bothered. You consider it a waste of time."

"I do."

"And I consider that you are, or should be, by position, reputation, and career, an upholder of the mother country's interests and ready to give a fostering hand

to whatever widens her trade. Again I appeal to you to give up one hour, one hour only, out of your day or week or month, whatever you like, to the close inspection of these articles. You can rip them all to pieces if you like to assure yourself of the workmanship. Then let me hear your verdict."

Colonel Leeward's thin white hand stroked the sparsely growing hair on the crown of his head. He remained silent. In his twenty years of official life he had never been tackled like this before. Not only was his office, a sanctum in which men trembled on his nod, turned into a showroom, but the showman was fastened on him with the grip of an octopus, and giving him nasty squeezes, too.

In that part of him yet uncrushed by the office Juggernaut there still lingered a love of the nation's progress ; he liked these people of the younger nations, but he liked them at a distance. When they brought their hustling methods to England—and to *him*—he hated them.

He could, of course, turn Richard Heene out, or peremptorily bid him take himself off, but that would raise trouble. The Agent-General would construe it into a slight ; this plain-spoken young man was just the kind to make the whole incident public.

Moreover in certain official quarters a word and a wink had gone round that wealthy Australians visiting England were to receive attention, following on the heels of a precedent established by a Canadian peer of eminence.

No definite instructions are ever issued in diplomatic circles ; the powers that shape destinies express themselves in the flicker of an eyelash. Colonel Leeward had long ago mastered the art of observing eyelashes in official eyes.

The clock ticked while he silently stroked his hair, not more than thirty or forty ticks, but they sounded like the dominating tick of Big Ben himself, if that

monster were removed and grounded within four walls.

Dick grew desperate, jumped up from his chair and seized a fibre blanket, which he spread on the sacred secretarial table before the astonished eyes of the chief in the chair.

“ If you have time for nothing else, Colonel Leeward, let me show you these army blankets ; note the quality and texture, how they compare with what you use already. Here is serge, stout, durable, warm, recognized by experts to be equal to that known to the Admiralty——”

Once started he went on without mercy. The hapless individual in the revolving chair had to listen or bolt, for any attempt at speech was unheeded. The son of the Southern Cross held the floor and meant to make the most of it.

CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

Great men do not need to sit on mountains.

WHILE this lecture was in progress the door was quietly opened and a little elderly man entered. He had a shrewd face, with wonderfully kind, patient eyes, eyes that were as alert and watchful as they were kind. In one swift glance he took in the whole scene.

Colonel Leeward, bored and resigned in his chair, rose quickly to his feet, and just as quickly subsided again, for the new visitor made a deprecatory sign with his hand, and shook his head as if he did not wish the speaker to be disturbed.

Colonel Leeward naturally assumed that the newcomer had some motive in being present, and insensibly changed his attitude to that of an interested listener.

Dick Heene noticed this and without understanding the cause felt that he was winning ; it spurred him to greater efforts. He was aware that a stranger had entered ; he had even glanced at the stranger and felt that his face was familiar, but was too immersed in his subject to think about it. If the second listener could be made interested so much the better. An air of authority clung to him ; indeed, there was much more mastery in his air of authority than in Colonel Leeward's, yet the newcomer was as quiet as a mouse.

He stood for awhile, negativizing with that deprecatory gesture, as slight as it was decisive, the offer of a chair.

Then pushing some books aside, sat on the office table, where the army blanket still remained, with an army saddle on top of that, then a forage sack, a pile of rope, a piece of carpet half flung on the floor, with a mattress to bank up the whole.

It was a pretty situation. The newcomer's eyes twinkled with humorous appreciation, as the lecturer caught up his samples, explained them, and threw them this way and that.

Everything that was claimed for marine fibre Dick Heene made abundantly clear. He marvelled at the length of time given him, for Colonel Leeward made no movement to cut him short. He could not know that the highly-placed official was in presence of the very highest personage in this particular province of the nation's affairs, and that his intent interest was the Colonel's cue for his own behaviour.

Once or twice he leant over to see what Heene was handling, and Dick involuntarily turned to him. As Dick was now quite master of himself, as well as his subject, he could spare a little time for observation, and wondered why the face of the stranger was like that of an old friend.

There was something impelling about him, something suggestive of work carried to a triumphant issue, hard work, too, from the lines in his face ; a lifetime of work from his age. The little man had the look of working from the very hour he was born. Not that he seemed weary or worn, or even old. From the clear light in his eyes and the vitality of his features he might be as young as Heene himself ; yet his face held all the secrets that are given to a wise and glorious old age that is tinged with the irradiating light of eternity.

As Heene came to a pause the stranger spoke for the first time. It was a quiet voice, almost deferential, with no tricks of effect or accent, certainly without the ring of office.

"I didn't hear the beginning; would you mind going back a bit? What was that about the admixture of wool with the use of ordinary machinery?"

Thereupon Dick began all over again. He glanced at Colonel Leeward, expecting to hear him groan, but that gentleman was if possible more interested than before.

The stranger moved from his perch on the table and began to examine the exhibits. He gave a particularly lynx-eyed scrutiny to the army articles, asked many questions, and listened to the whole story of the fibre's discovery, its gradual struggle into recognition, the hopes entertained of its future.

"It looks as if it were come to stay," he observed, with a merry glint in his eyes. "Whose idea was it to bring all this stuff here?"

"Colonel Leeward kindly gave me permission, sir, and I brought it yesterday evening."

As Dick uttered the word "sir" the stranger's identity flashed upon him and he knew he should have said "my lord." For a moment he felt embarrassed, but this passed. If "sir" was good enough for the King, it was good enough for the King's men, no matter how illustrious they were.

Colonel Leeward broke in:

"Mr. Heene thought it would suit my convenience better to have the articles here, so that I could inspect them with greater thoroughness."

"What an old humbug!" thought Dick, but outwardly he assumed entire unanimity.

"And what have you done since you have been in England?" was the next question, asked with almost paternal kindness. The wise, patient eyes had lost their twinkle and looked serious. No man, certainly no great man, could be more sympathetic with youthful hope and ambition. The whole nation knew the grand heart in the small human frame and gave him a

love that has been given to but few men in the history of the world.

"I hope you succeed ; indeed, I am sure you will, if you go on as you have begun."

"Thank you—my lord."

The twinkle returned to the little man's eyes. He even emitted a monosyllable, as if he were amused at being found out.

Looking into those eyes, Dick felt the magic of them. Not that they were beautiful or unusual in shape or colour, but because the man's whole spiritual force, expressed in his eyes, revealed his nature and his way with other men. For they were eyes that held compassion for all downtrodden things crushed by the heel of might, eyes that could flash fury at renegades, and set hard and stern at slovenliness.

Yet they could kindle to softness and win the heart of a little child. More than that they were eyes gifted with power to read beyond the veil. They looked into the future and read menace to his country ; they saw the fiery streak of war on the horizon while other men slumbered.

In extreme old age he gave his message with the clarion tongue of youth. And his brave, wise spirit sways England still from beyond the grave.

"I feel quite pleased with what I've been hearing," he continued. "Some slight knowledge of the subject had come to me, of course, through the newspapers, but I had no idea it was so forward as this. What will you do with all these things? Leave them here?"

An agonized expression shot over Colonel Leeward's face.

"For pity's sake, don't leave me here buried amongst all this rubbish !" it said as plainly as a face could speak.

"I'll take them away this evening unless Colonel Leeward would like them to remain."

"No, no," ejaculated Colonel Leeward hurriedly.

"But where will you take them?" questioned the great little man, who seemed much exercised over the ultimate settlement of the exhibits.

"They really belong to my office in Gracechurch Street, my lord, where I invite everyone I can hear about to come and see them."

"I thought you might have it in your mind to offer them to some scientific institution."

"I should be very pleased to offer another set equally complete to any such institution if you could suggest one, my lord, or one in which you take an interest."

"My lord" shot a keen glance at the young man. Dick felt himself read down to the soles of his boots.

"You've guessed my thoughts, but it isn't anything so important as an institution. Some lads I know are intent on getting together a museum, though even that's too big a name for it. They are trying to form a collection of growths found on seashores. Whenever they go on a seaside holiday they rummage round that particular bit of coast and collect whatever is available. They have some little publication, called *Seashore Scampers*, in which they announce their gleanings. I like to encourage boys' originality and powers of observation, especially when it means added knowledge that may subsequently be utilized. If you could send them two or three samples of the product it would please them very much."

He did not parade the fact that he had paid for several of the holidays so as to get the boys started on a useful hobby.

"I'll be only too delighted, my lord. How would it do for me to invite them to my office and hear about the whole thing, then let them choose what they like?"

"You would have them emigrating to Australia in a

body to take a hand in scratching up the fibre wholesale. They would certainly save the expense of a dredging machine."

He laughed pleasantly, and the Colonel echoed the laugh. His visage began to look quite cheerful.

"To what address am I to write, my lord?"

"Oh, I suppose they are all at school now until Easter, but give me your card, and I'll tell the leader or secretary, or whatever he calls himself, to get in touch with you. Accept my thanks for so kindly interesting yourself in the matter."

"It is an honour, sir."

The little man bowed slightly and turned away, taking up a newspaper. A momentary silence ensued. Dick felt it a dismissal, but did not quite know what to do. Yet he must make the most of his opportunity. He addressed himself to Colonel Leeward.

"Perhaps you would like me to leave now and return later on——"

"Not to go into the matter again," came the quick rejoinder. The Colonel looked really alarmed.

"No, to hear your verdict. Whether you feel interested enough to help me with your influence."

"Of course I am interested. The stuff clearly merits attention, but whether I can help you is another matter."

"But will you help me with your influence if the chance arises?"

"I'll do what I can, but you mustn't build too much on it."

"Thank you. That's all I ask. Good morning."

"What about all this litter?" was the anxious question.

"It shall be removed this evening after you——"

"—— might like to have a look at it," interposed the little man quietly, without removing his eyes from the paper.

Dick did not catch the name, but his heart leapt.

"Oh, leave it here for a day or two," said Colonel Leeward, and Dick bowed himself out.

The incident had no apparent result for weeks, but Dick was beginning to understand the English inertia, and did not attempt to force matters. He would only have met with snubs and refusals. There were plenty of other men to see, some not nearly as courteous as Colonel Leeward, some who deliberately prided themselves on squashing applicants and applications alike. Yet the fact leaked out—and Dick took care to make the most of it—that a certain supreme authority had spoken very encouragingly over this new commodity and believed in its future. Even the squashing section felt curious. It was as if a ripple set in that betokened the turn of the tide. Dick chose to think so, anyway, and kept the demon of depression at bay. It was the power to maintain a serene and cheerful outlook on life that helped him more than his father's money, for the cheerful man has a hoard that is greater than gold.

One side issue of his visit to Colonel Leeward grew to unexpected proportions.

The boys who were making a hobby of seashore growths appeared on the scene, rather shyly at first, in twos and threes, seemingly bored with being in their best clothes and on their best behaviour; but Dick liked boys and made them feel at home. He won their hearts by giving them as much of the fibre as ever they wanted to experiment upon. In return, they devoted whole issues of their leaflet journal, *Seashore Scampers*, to a description of this wonderful thing from the land of the sun and the Southern Cross. The little periodical, unknown to Fleet Street, was the work of the boys themselves, and when a magazine of eminence gave a word of recognition, they were out of their wits with delight.

Their enthusiasm caught the masters of the schools, who, in their turn, paid visits to Gracechurch Street.

Dick Heene was invited to help in arranging lectures. The boys carried the tale to their homes and their people, and as some of these were connected with mercantile firms the interest deepened. Some became shareholders. It was all helping to swell the stream of eventual success

CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO

He who tries to open a friend's eyes must expect blows.

MAURICE DARLEY called at Portchester Gardens one evening. Fortune had given a turn of her wheel in his direction, resulting in an important commission, and he was working with the ardour of youth. But it was not to talk of this that he had come.

"I've a surprise for you, Dick, though I am afraid you will not like it, as you and the lady are—um——"

Dick guessed he was alluding to the "Louis d'Or."

"Mrs. Merch has given you a commission for a bust of her late husband."

Darley's fair face flamed.

"Oh, come, let's be done with dead husbands. Say rather a live one—she's going to marry me."

Dick's mouth opened stupidly for a moment, then he jumped out of his chair and clapped his hands on Darley's shoulders.

"Not if I know it! Maurice! You mustn't!"

Darley shook off the arresting clutch.

"What the devil's it to do with you, Heene?"

"Because she's no good."

"I defy you to say one word against her!"

"I'll say several, and you can defy as much as you like. She's a bad lot!"

"I'll not hear——"

"Oh, shut up and listen. I'm not talking of her morals but of her character."

Darley made a stride towards the door, furious and battling for words.

"See here, Heene, anybody else, and I would have laid him flat, but I owe much to you, and gratitude keeps me silent. Still, there are things a man can't take even from his dearest friend, and—I'll hear no more."

Richard Heene got his back firmly against the door before Darley could reach it.

"Do you know that woman gave her husband a solemn promise on his deathbed to set right a wrong he had committed, and that she never fulfilled her promise?"

"What's it to me? That's her affair. *I* don't care."

"Ay, but you will care when you hear what the promise was."

"I tell you I don't care!" shouted Darley. "Let me out—our friendship's over."

"Rot! It's only begun, you'll thank me yet. The promise Looena Merch made to her dying husband concerned the Engadee property. It was to restore the Engadee estate to its rightful owner—and the rightful owner is your sister, Tom Diss's widow, and her child, Nora!"

Darley's infuriated manner grew quiet, though he stood in the full tempest of his wrath, like a bull checked in a charge.

"I never alluded to the matter before because I knew that you and your sister were estranged, and you have all along refused to speak of her, but you can't allow the wrong done to her to be accentuated by such a marriage."

"What the devil are you driving at? Can't you say it in two words? What had Tom Diss to do with Merch?"

"He was his partner. They owned a mine twenty-five years ago that they gave up as a bad spec., but

after Diss died the mine turned out trumps, and with the money Merch built Engadee. On his deathbed remorse prompted him to exact a promise from his wife that restitution should be made. I've written to your sister advising her to have the matter put into legal trim. Ben Torridge, who was my informant, is willing to take his stand in the witness box. Looena Merch has done nothing to fulfil that deathbed promise. Now you can see her devilish aim to get clutch of you and work the sister out of her property."

"By thunder, she won't though! Will you confront her and repeat what you have now said."

"I've already done so—on board the boat, and she threatened me very handsomely."

Darley walked about the room in great agitation and Dick ceased his sentinelship.

"Forgive me, old man, I had to say this. You'll admit it was right presently."

"If what you say is true, by——"

He clenched his fist and stopping in his walk faced Dick again.

"Write down all this, just as you have said it to me, and sign it."

"Certainly."

Heene wrote rapidly, Darley watching with a frown.

"Thanks," he grunted, and went out without another word.

"Poor devil, he's hit!" thought Heene.

The door opened again and Darley reappeared. But he could not say what was in his heart and turned miserably away. Dick went to him.

"Let's part friends, old man," and Darley gripped the outstretched hand. No more words passed and he walked out.

"Surely he'll stand by his own flesh and blood," mused Dick.

Darley did stand by his own flesh and blood, as a communication next morning proved.

The handwriting was masculine, but the sentiments revealed the secret of sex.

My life is upset and made desolate through you, and I will be avenged. You too shall suffer and see your dearest hopes in the dust, and your ambition shattered. Then remember the

LOUIS D'OR.

"That's all right, now we know where we are. Perhaps it is wiser not to destroy this, my dear lady, in face of coming events."

But he little dreamed what the "coming events" might portend. A prevision crossed his mind for an instant, and he cast about for a likely course of action.

"She'll stick at nothing, she's just the sort."

He recalled the cold fury of her light eyes during the quarrel on the boat. With this new development he gave her credit for greater force of character than at first.

"She's clever enough to euchre me in her plan of revenge, but this snap at securing Darley suggests the brain of an evil genius. She could have hurried on the marriage and Tom Diss's widow wouldn't care to go to law with her family connections and set the place agape."

His own affairs were giving him trouble without this extra worry over an estate at the Antipodes. He bent to his correspondence so arduously that he felt boxed and shut in by the high roofs and mist-bound chimneys that filled his daily vision.

"I wish I could get away from these everlasting walls. Southshire would be better than this."

But he could not leave the city.

"Is there any place near London where you can get a feeling of open air and space?" he asked Burston.

"Richmond Park, eight miles square. If that isn't big enough for you, Wimbledon Common, Putney

Heath, Barnes Common and Kew Gardens flank it. You ought to get a sense of open air there."

The next day was Saturday and he could indulge his whim for a tramp, when the great airy spaces of Richmond Park appealed so much to his mood, that he made a Saturday habit of it with the watchful Snuff at his heels.

Sundays were more or less devoted to social matters, for he was making friends. Men liked the quietly-spoken young fellow, bent on his big game of capturing a world market and establishing a new industry.

Yet despite this he was lonely, for a feeling of strangeness clung to him. Of Nora Diss he heard nothing save the few gleanings he eagerly devoured from the Australian papers.

With the coming of February the days began to draw out; he fancied there was a hint of spring in the long sweeping distances of the Park. Or perhaps spring was sending her breath across the Channel from her snug fastness in southern France.

One particular spot enchanted him by the hour together, the beech grove, nature's cathedral, with the great beech trunks forming the aisles, and their branches, still bare, arching overhead like a fretwork against the sky roof.

When the winter wind blew through, the sound was like an organ, and though he was no musician, he felt the harmony in swell and roar, moan and sob.

The pine trees made music too, but they lived in a weird darkness of their own, as if they held many mysteries. The cathedral of giant beeches fed his soul.

Most Australians used to the expanses of their own country experience this sense of space in Richmond Park.

One Saturday he had walked on as usual, pausing at all the familiar spots, lingering by the pen ponds to feed the insistent swans, and making for the beech

grove. Snuff raced about with the tireless energy of a dozen dogs. Such days were his heaven.

The evening grey was creeping everywhere, developing into faint mist over the sward, and clinging with pearly transparency to the great trees. The dog was lost among the bushes ; his bark sounded excited and sharp.

Dick stood straining his eyes upward to see what hint of coming bud lay in the swelling branches, when a quick whizzing cut the air shrilly and he felt a sharp stinging blow on the shoulder which made him stagger for a second. In the same moment came another blow on the head.

Some hard wooden object rattled to his feet, and mechanically he made a clutch to seize it. In the curved piece of wood he recognized a familiar shape.

" Good God ! It's a boomerang ! Who—how——"

The question died on his lips and he sank to the ground unconscious.

From behind a huge oak a woman's figure emerged, flitting from trunk to trunk, so grey-clad and so lightly stepping that she might have been some materialization of the shadows.

Peering out cautiously from the tree-trunk nearest Heene she allowed several moments to pass before her next move, then ran forward, waited yet again, this time breathing sharply, as if nerving herself to a purpose, then bent swiftly down and felt beside his limp and prostrate body, presently drawing away the sinister weapon of death.

" Perhaps he's only stunned," she muttered. " I had better make sure." But before she could carry out her evil intention, there was a quick pattering of little feet, and Snuff, scenting mischief, rushed forward and snapped at her hand.

A wild panic took her and she ran like a hunted creature to the gates, the flight loosening her hair until it fell about her in a bright shower,

CHAPTER THIRTY-THREE

Fright is a good servant but a bad master.

THE dog scrambled round the prostrate form of his master and yelped in terror at the faint, long-drawn-out moan that was his only response.

The evening descended like a veil on the great spaces of the Park and the trees were huge masses of shadow. Save for the last calls of the birds there was no other sound but the shrill barking of a terrified dog.

Dick Heene lay very still, even the moaning was ended.

The quick beat of hoofs made a rhythmic clink on the road, drawing nearer and coming to a pause at sound of the barking. Two men were in a dogcart, and one jumped out with a loud "Hallo!" Receiving no answer he went forward.

"It must be a keeper's dog after game. Hallo! What time do the main gates close?"

The dog recognized a human voice and dashed to meet it; then grew fearful and leapt back again, redoubling his yelps.

The men strained their eyes.

"It's a cyclist come to grief. I can see a man's figure on the grass. Hallo, there! A bit of a fix for him if they are strict about the gates."

He drew nearer as he spoke, but there was no bicycle in the vicinity of the huddled figure. The dog sprang upon the stranger in a frantic effort to be understood.

To loosen Dick's collar was the first aid ; the man found his hands wet.

"Blood!" He glanced round in alarm. "This looks serious. Decent chap too. Can't be footpads about, surely. Watch all right."

His companion's curiosity was aroused and he also left the dogcart. They struck a match and cried out at what the momentary flash revealed.

"It's no accident ; something queer, and it must have happened recently. We can't leave him here, that's certain ; let's get him out of the Park."

Together they lifted Heene to the floor of the dogcart and put the dog between them on the seat. But Snuff leapt down beside his master, whimpering anxiously.

To their relief the gates were not closed. Without loss of time they took him to the nearest doctor's, explaining the circumstances, leaving their names and addresses, for they could not wait for developments.

Dr. Harvey gave quick treatment and telephoned for an ambulance. A glance at Heene's pocket-book revealed him to be of substance, and the doctor also rang up the police-station.

"It's a blow and a pretty bad one, too. He should have careful nursing at once." He decided that the stranger must be taken to a private hospital with which he was connected. In the more important matter of getting the still unconscious man in and out of the house, the dog was forgotten.

Snuff rushed after the ambulance, breaking his faithful little heart in an agonized effort to keep it in sight in the dark streets, but he lost it and flew hither and thither, yelping and panic-stricken. In his wanderings he entered a railway station, and found his way to a waiting room, where a woman with a bandaged hand sat near a fire, securing something under her long coat.

The dog smelt round her for a moment, then sprang

at her furiously, leaping up and biting her chin. Her scream brought people running in.

"This dog bit me—it's the second time!"

They looked about, but to Snuff was given an added sense that night, for he had the instinct to dodge the crowd and fly while they listened to the woman.

The "Louis d'Or" was never troubled with nerves in her adventurous life, but she almost took leave of her senses with the double fear of hydrophobia and the possibility of discovery. For she imagined that Heene must be at the railway station since the dog had tracked her.

After having the bite cauterized at a chemist's she took train for London, then changing her mind, broke the journey at Kew, and walked to the bridge, whence she dropped something over, and listened for the answering splash of the water. None came, and her heart stood still for a moment as she tried to conjecture the cause. A man's voice shouted, "Hallo there!" and she flew in dire fright.

As not a medical man on the staff could say how the blow was caused, and there was no sign of robbery, the theory held good that the patient had been attacked by some tramp whose evil intentions were frustrated.

People who feared aeroplanes were of opinion that something had been dropped from above.

The police were on the watch for disreputables loitering in the Park and made two or three arrests on suspicion; but they were compelled to wait till Heene recovered sufficiently to speak. Yet when this eventuated he could throw no light on the incident, save that he heard a whizzing sound and found himself struck by a boomerang.

This added a new note of complexity, as not a soul knew what a boomerang was, but assuming it to be a weapon of some kind they searched the Park unavailingly.

The affair got into the papers. A young Australian

business man, recently arrived in England, had been struck by a boomerang in Richmond Park and there was no clue to the assailant. The death-dealing weapon was described :

A boomerang is between two and three feet long by three inches thick, flat on one side and slightly rounded on the other, with a sharp edge which in flight has the keenness of steel.

This set a number of idle people imagining vain things ; the police were worried with tarradiddles. Amongst the mendacity there came one piece of evidence, the actual production of a boomerang which had fallen into a boat passing under Kew Bridge on the supposed night of the assault.

This was a windfall to the reporters. The boomerang was photographed, an innocent piece of curved wood bearing a resemblance to the Serpentine more than to anything else in the mind of man. With photographs there necessarily followed descriptions of the method in which the weapon was thrown by the Australian blacks, how they gauged the distance so that if the boomerang did not strike the victim it returned to the thrower.

This started a royal scare. Nervous folk felt chary of parks and lonely stretches where boomerangs could find sport and bemoaned the condition of the times which permitted these novelties in crime.

With garrotting, clubbing, shooting, sandbagging, and kindred forms of attack the assailant was at least at close quarters, and could be dealt with, but in this outbreak of boomeranging nobody was safe.

It brought Torridge hot-foot to the private hospital where Dick Heene lay with a bandaged head, chafing at the inaction, yet fully sensible of the suffocating feeling in his brain when he tried to think.

"Lord, lad, but you had a squeak," said Torridge, with genuine concern in his face. "I got a bang myself

once on Lake Tyers, where a black fellow was showing his skill to some tourists."

"But there are no blacks here."

"You mean to say you haven't spotted your enemy?"

"I haven't an enemy likely to play that trick on me."

"Simple. There's only one person in all England could do it, and from what you told me she is your enemy."

"*She!* You mean——"

"I do, by thunder! She can throw two boomerangs at once better than any black. She learnt the trick from them near her father's run in Gippsland. Didn't I tell you this on the boat?"

"I never thought of her."

Dick remained quiet for a little; Torridge fidgetted.

"If you'll let me tip a wink to the police——"

"No. Let's keep it dark for the present. She's put herself in my power now with a vengeance. I'll have her quietly watched to bring it home to her, and then——"

"Ay, then say, 'Here, my lady, ante-up with Engadee or it'll be the worse for you.'"

Dick laughed, the first laugh since he had opened his eyes in a private hospital.

"She's a bit too clever. I must get hold of this boomerang. Some of her friends may have seen it in her possession, and I have a little threat of hers in writing. Probably she found out that I went on a Saturday afternoon tramp in Richmond Park, and took her chance. But I say, Torridge, do something for me. My little terrier, Snuff, was with me that day and I can't hear a word of him. I've got a half-fanciful recollection of his barking when I fell, but nobody knows anything of him. Will you offer a reward? A little, sharp-nosed, white terrier, with black patches on the ears and flank."

"I'll see to it, lad. Just you tell me what wants doing or seeing to, Bella too, for that matter, and it's done."

It was curious how an unkempt little mongrel of the streets was to be the means of rivetting a chain of evidence.

Torridge in his whole-hearted eagerness to keep his promise thought it would not be what he called half a bad idea to have a reward placard up at Richmond Station. He reasoned that as Dick Heene generally left Richmond by train, after spending the afternoon in walking, the dog might make his way there.

The station-master assented, then suddenly asked :

"What sort of a dog?"

Torridge described it as well as he could.

"Well, it's odd. There was a dog of that kind here some nights back and caused a commotion by biting a lady."

"Ah! What was she like?" The station-master smiled.

"Now how on earth can I remember details of that kind?"

"But was she long or short, dark or fair?"

"Oh, tallish and fair. I remember her hair was a bit loose; it was bright gold, not red, more like the colour of a sovereign."

"The dog bit her, you say?"

"Yes, a nasty bite, she had it cauterized——"

"Where?"

"How should I know? There are several chemists not far away. I only remember she was in a blue funk over it, and seemed quite shaken up when she took the train back to London."

"She did go back to London, then?"

"Yes."

"Does the train go over Kew Bridge?"

"No." The station-master began to think the sturdy little red man was not quite sane.

"Can you remember anything more about her—or the dog?"

"She was thieving the dog if that's what you're after, because she said the dog rushed in and bit her, and that it was the second time that day the dog had bitten her. Her hand was bandaged——"

"Eh, what?"

"Really, I haven't time to bother over such details. Still, if you think she stole the dog, you are welcome to my statements."

"Thank you, sir, thank you. It's the best turn you could do me. Bully for the dog! I hope he doesn't get blood-poisoning from his bites."

All trace of the dog vanished from that point, despite the reward notice. But the news carried to Heene of the terrier's doings made his eyes misty.

"I see it. I never could understand how the boomerang disappeared, because I distinctly remember having it in my hands. She must have marked me fall and taken it away, then the dog bit her."

The next piece of information Torridge unearthed was that a lady with hair the colour of a sovereign had visited two different chemists in Richmond that evening, one for a wounded hand, the other for a bite on the chin.

"She's taken to collecting souvenirs," chuckled the mayor of Locker Gully.

CHAPTER THIRTY-FOUR

Four little pattering feet,
A nose to smell out the way,
Through miles of weary street,
A faithful heart at bay.

THE little terrier ran out of the waiting-room as the crowd gathered to the woman's scream ; through the first opening into the street, where he raced this way and that, now and then pausing with one foot uplifted, cocking his ears for a well-known voice. None came, yet he kept on.

The night grew quieter and the racket of the streets gave place to echoing footfalls and distant rumbles of wheels, with an occasional voice singing or shouting or whistling. It was not the voice he knew, and after a time he ceased to listen, but just went on wearily, as if impelled to keep going ; not a trot now, but a footsore limp.

Once he stopped to drink and the tired little body crouched awhile. Perhaps the dog's brain worked, puzzling out the locality, for he stood up, looked all around him and sank down again, with his head stretched on his forepaws and his eyes open.

Even this brief rest was denied him, for a great mastiff pounced down with a threatening bark and Snuff fled for his life, racing along another lonely mile and meeting neither friend nor foe.

He had reached the river, where he crept into a deserted boat, and curled himself into miserable,

shivering slumber, wet, muddy, begrimed, hungry. But with the dawn a stone descended on his aching body, and a harsh voice shouted "Garn! Ye beast!"

Again Snuff took to his heels to avoid another missile. He emerged near Hammersmith Bridge, where seafaring men were busy hauling boats about and preparing for the day's toil. Savoury smells issued from many open doors, and the dog paused wistfully. An eternity had gone by since his last meal. Perhaps he remembered his pariah state, for he sought sustenance, as he did then, in a dustbin.

But a cat was before him, and gave a nasty claw on the nose that made Snuff howl and roll over in his fright. The cat pursued her advantage, springing a second time on her natural enemy, and the dog was too dazed and broken-hearted to snarl.

Yet in this old-world corner of London there are kind hearts. A woman ran out to stop the feud. The cat was bigger than the dog, and the woman's compassion was moved.

"A poor little mongrel!"

"'Tisn't," said a boy. "He's got a collar on; he's lawst! Don't let 'im go. There might be a reward."

"A reward for a dirty, ugly scrap like that!"

But she threw morsels of bread and scraped a plate. Snuff wagged his tail at the sense of protection and picked up the bounty. The boy sprang roughly to examine the collar, but the dog mistrusted his intention and raced off again, the boy in pursuit, and seizing Snuff after a few yards so heedlessly that both dog and boy got in front of a motor, and the driver was hard put to it to avoid an accident.

"You young devil! Why can't you look where you're going?"

"I'm tryin' to get the dawg; he's lawst, an' there's a reward."

The motorist jumped out, snatched Snuff from the urchin, and flung him into the car.

"Then you'll not get the reward; teach you to be careful and avoid giving trouble. Gad! it's enough to start heart disease."

He took his seat again and sped away. Snuff recognized friendly intentions and wagged his tail. The man eyed him and noticed the collar.

"Jump up," he said, striking the seat, and Snuff jumped.

"Richard Heene, 27, Portchester Gardens, W."

"Well, I can't go back now; I'll leave word at the first police-station. The boy said there was a reward. I wonder how he knew?"

Snuff himself spoiled this good intention. Probably his sense of locality told him he was being taken further away from his home, for he began to whimper uneasily, and sprang to the floor of the car again, looking about him in patent anxiety.

Then he leapt wildly out, rolled over and over in the dust, and picking himself up once more raced in an opposite direction.

"The poor little brute understood I was driving away from London," thought the man as he glanced back. "I hope he finds his way. 'Heene, Portchester Gardens,' I must try and remember. Perhaps he's on the 'phone."

He threw another glance, but Snuff was now out of sight. Throughout another maddening day of ceaseless noise and traffic a begrimed and frightened mongrel might be seen darting to and fro, following a chance face, sometimes waiting wistfully outside an open door. He picked up a good meal though, as he found his way into a playground where children were eating their lunches, and his sad eyes stirred their pity. The food made him sleepy; he crept into a shed behind an empty barrel, where he lay out of sight for many hours until night fell once more.

In sallying forth now he did not race to and fro, but trotted along like a creature with a settled purpose. A

more business-like looking little dog it would be hard to find. Now and again he put his sharp nose to the ground and cocked his ears. This was always followed by a turn into another street. By some indefinable instinct he was gradually sensing locality.

Another mile would have brought him to a road he knew well, when a woman emerged from a provision shop and dropped a small parcel of cooked meat. In an instant Snuff had jumped after it, rescued it from the gutter, and nosed open the wrapping. But the woman snatched it away, then her heart misgave her, and she threw him a scrap.

"Poor thing; at any rate, he saved the meat from the gutter. Want some more, doggy?"

Doggy did. He liked the sound of her voice and wagged his tail. She threw him another scrap; then a thought struck her and she looked round rather guiltily. It was very late and nobody at hand. She stooped, patted his head and made friends, then took him in her arms.

Snuff found himself being run away with. For a moment the proximity of the package of meat against his very nose dulled his other senses; but he remembered duty and struggled. She held him fast, uttering soothing words in a kind drone.

"Nice little doggy, good supper for doggy, doggy catch rats. Um-um-um!"

Snuff understood what rats meant; but he was not anxious to catch them just then, and tried to express himself to that effect. She only held him the more tightly and hurried her pace, running up some steps to a door. She let herself in with difficulty, as the dog, imagining disaster, was using all his strength to get free. It was of no avail. She opened the door, shut it behind her and let the dog drop on the floor of the hall. He pawed the lower bolt, refusing her offer of meat. Another woman appeared.

"Kitty, look! I've found a little lost dog."

"But he's got a collar," objected Kitty.

"That's why I brought him home. We want a dog to keep down the rats and this is the very one. The collar will save registration, as I can say I am minding him for the owner, or rather a friend of the owner, not to be too particular ; or I can say the dog found his way in, and I was just going out to, etc., etc. At the worst I can lose him again if necessary."

Kitty laughed and commenced to make friends, carrying Snuff into the kitchen, and offering such a luxurious meal that he forgot the front door.

They kept him in the kitchen that night, though he whined and whimpered and scratched. Yet his natural instinct for rat-catching overruled his desire for freedom. In an interval of tired dozing a rat stole out on a foraging expedition and Snuff awakened to business, rousing the household with his sharp barks and securing the marauder.

The women came down in their nightdresses and made much of the dog. Snuff wagged his tail at his own prowess.

Next day they put him on a chain in the yard. It was a long light chain, giving him plenty of space to run about, but the dog did not know what to make of it, and felt annoyed. For three days he was kept like this, kindly, even affectionately treated, but not given any exercise, for the women were afraid of losing him.

Then the dog set his brain to work. Straining on his chain produced no result ; but he found that by going the length of the chain and turning round he could get the collar on his ears. The imminent risk of choking forced him to self-preservation, and balancing on his hind legs he caught the collar with both paws and forced it off. He was free ! The next instant he had scrambled under the gate and had taken up the burden of his pilgrimage once more.

The three days' good food and kindness had made a new man of him ; his terror of the streets was gone. He

meant business now, and as he was not hungry he dashed along with the keen joy of freedom until he reached Hyde Park.

If ever a dog could be said to possess a country this was it. Many an evening gambol made the place familiar. Faster, faster, flew the little white legs, a monarch of all he surveyed, an atom in the wilderness, yet ever nearing home with unerring instinct.

Just as a taxi drew up in Portchester Gardens and Dick Heene alighted, a tumultuous barking greeted him, with a small black and white object, more perpendicular than horizontal, leaping frantically into the air.

Snuff was giving his welcome home.

CHAPTER THIRTY-FIVE

Clues are like footprints on a lonely shore.

THERE was one gleam among the clouds that shone like a veritable sunburst to Dick Heene, a letter from Nora Diss, cordial and cheering, with odds and ends of gossip and comment.

"She little dreams it's on her account," mused Dick, and hungry for further news he replied at once, talking generally of his affairs, and saying he would like to see her on a very important matter concerning herself as soon as she returned to London.

"You mysterious boy, what *do* you mean?" came a one-line note, signed "N.D."

"It must keep till we meet.—R.H."

The way was fairly opened now for a correspondence; but though Dick refused to disclose his secret, he fed on her letters.

Nora was finding more joy in her trip, as the invitations from Lady Rose's friends and relations brought some knowledge of rural England and historic spots. In the intervals of visiting, Lady Rose occupied a furnished flat in Sloane Street, and looked about for a suitable town house.

Dick emerged from the hospital while the boomerang was enjoying its fame in the newspapers, and engaged a private detective to shadow the "Louis d'Or," but that elusive lady had to be found before she could be shadowed. She was too wise to go near Robert Falcott's office.

Dick himself interviewed Falcott without much result. He knew nothing of Mrs. Merch's movements, indeed knew nothing about her, or very little ; quite recently he had met her in Cornhill and asked her to lunch ; remembered she said something about going abroad ; a curious, irresponsible woman ; did not attach any importance to her plans, but a mutual friend had sent a letter of introduction, and so forth.

"Mr. Falcott," struck in Dick impatiently, "I am aware that Mrs. Merch gave you information concerning my business, and that you got the name of my Continental agents from her."

"I don't understand you," said Falcott, reddening, and he raised his hand to adjust his pince-nez, the better to wither his visitor.

But in raising his hand his shirt-cuff slipped slightly from his coat-sleeve, and a tiny red flash in the stud caught Dick's notice. It was a ruby set in a sovereign ! Dick forgot the "Louis d'Or" in this new discovery, and glued his eyes on the other shirt cuff, keeping silence until Falcott began to fidget.

"I'm very busy," he said, as a hint to leave.

"So am I," returned Dick, still staring. "I hope to be busier presently. Is that coat you're wearing made of the marine fibre ?"

Involuntarily Falcott stretched out his arm, puzzled at the question and somewhat affronted. The cloth was good and fine. Dick saw a fellow sovereign gemmed with a ruby ; it seemed a match for that in the other cuff ; both were similar to the one locked up in his desk.

"He's had a second stud made to match."

With this thought came wisdom. Instead of making a rumpus over the stud and putting his rival on guard, he alluded again to the coat.

"A mistake, excuse me. We are both interested in the same material, and I was wondering whether you were utilizing the product——"

Falcott saw his chance of a cutting retort.

“ If you were as well up in the subject as is necessary to establish a successful market, you would know that marine fibre has no value for suitings of any kind.”

“ Oh, indeed ! ” Dick’s voice was innocent, but he chuckled to himself.

“ Before another six months are over, old chap, you will be a bit wiser.” Then aloud : “ Well, if you can’t tell me anything more of Mrs. Merch, I’ll go. I mustn’t take up any more of your time. Good morning.”

“ I’ve snubbed the young cub,” thought Falcott. “ Marine fibre to be used as cloth, what next ? Fancy sending an ass like that over here.”

Heene put another job before his detective—to find out where Falcott had the broken stud repaired.

“ It’ll be somewhere between his city station and his office or his lunch place. It would not be a mean shop, because the work is good.”

There were about a dozen jewellers on the route indicated. The detective hit on the right one on pretext of matching a stone in a broken link, and found that a snapped stud had been repaired for Mr. Falcott. The date was the day following the discovery in Richard Heene’s office.

Dick made a tiny packet of the broken sleeve-link and sent it, registered, to Falcott with a note :

Dear Sir,—The day I called on you to inquire the whereabouts of Mrs. Stephen Merch I noticed that you wore a peculiar sleeve-link. This seems its fellow. If you care to learn how it came into my possession I shall be happy to tell you.—Yours truly,

RICHARD HEENE.

Falcott stupidly fell into the trap. Instead of keeping silent he incriminated himself by an angry reply :

Mr. Robert Falcott fails to understand why Mr. Heene should send him a broken sleeve-link, herewith returned, as it does not belong to Mr. Falcott ; nor does it bear the least resemblance to the links Mr. Falcott has worn for years.

To which Heene mischievously answered :

If the said sleeve-links have been worn for years, how does Mr. Falcott explain that a missing one was recently matched at a certain jeweller's last January ?

Still another :

Dear Sir,—If you bother me any further with your ridiculous comments, I will put the matter into my solicitor's hands.

The Australian also wanted the last word :

The matter is already in legal hands. My solicitor advises Scotland Yard—and finger prints.

Falcott said no more. Perhaps he thought a great deal.

Heene cabled to the agents of the Engadee estate for Mrs. Merch's London address, but they did not reply. Nor was she seen at any place in London recognized as a rendezvous for visiting Australians. He kept the detective in pay, however, convinced that a clue would be found.

"If you only think hard enough over anything you have in hand, and make sure you are going to carry it through, you are bound to win," he said.

The detective did not believe in this theory.

"If it were true there would be no failures," he pointed out.

"The failures are either because the thinking or the faith has not been strong enough."

Then came a clue so extraordinary that it almost whistled through the air like the boomerang itself.

A girl entered Heene's office with a curt :

"I want to see the Australian business man who was struck by a boomerang."

"What name?" asked the clerk.

"Nothing to do with you. Where is he?"

"In his office; but you can't see him without stating your business."

Glancing beyond him unconcernedly she opened the inner door and walked in, repeating her story as if it were a formula.

"What do you want with me?"

The girl was dressed in serviceable tweed and carried a small portfolio.

"I've some pictures you might care to purchase."

Heene was kind-hearted, and surmising her to be an artist in difficulties offered a chair. But what she said electrified him.

"First of all I must tell you that I make a living by taking snapshots of all sorts of incidents that reflect human life. Some I sell to newspapers, and others to black-and-white artists for hints and suggestions. These snaps I have here I took some time back; then went over to Paris for a bit. When I returned I found that there had been a great hue and cry over a boomerang mystery; but I was too late. I missed my market. I've shown the snaps to four editors; but they said the subject was dead and only offered a few shillings. I wanted pounds.

"But what's this to do with me, Miss——"

"Rorke. The pictures concern you, or the boomerang—it's the same thing. I understand you cannot get hold of your assailant?"

"Quite true. Can your pictures help?"

"One second. The papers have all gone on the track of a supposed man. Now couldn't a woman throw a boomerang?"

Heene ejaculated and turned pale.

"You're near the truth."

"I *am* the truth, or my snaps are. Now are you prepared to pay for them—a pound apiece? I'm quite aware that I could go to the police with them as clues; but what would I get for my trouble? I want payment."

"You shall have it—if they're worth it."

"There's no 'if' about it. Either you pay a pound apiece, or I tear them up."

" Won't you let me see them first ? "

" No."

" Then I don't buy. You can't expect me to pay for what may be valueless."

" I tell you they are not valueless."

She was very earnest and deliberate, intent on trying to drive a bargain ; but her face was honest.

" Let's hear you describe them if you'll not show them. I ought to have a little explanation, surely ? "

" That's fair enough. Well, I was out snapping some Marathon runners who were sprinting in Richmond Park one afternoon late, and walked on a bit to see if I could pick up anything more, when I came on a lady all by herself engaged in what I thought was a new game. She was throwing something in a queer way, and it would come whizzing back to her. ' This is good enough,' I said to myself, and made a few snaps, without letting her see me. She made a ripping picture, though her splendid hair wouldn't show——"

" The money's yours ! " cried Dick in great excitement. " Give me those things."

" I wish I'd asked more," commented Miss Rorke, coolly ; " but a bargain's a bargain."

She opened her portfolio and handed four snapshots to Heene. His fingers trembled as he took them, and the room spun round as he recognized the Louis d'Or with the boomerang in its circle. Miss Rorke had taken her studies cleverly.

Heene pulled out his cheque-book.

" Miss Rorke, you have done me one of the best services imaginable. The sum you mentioned is not enough."

He handed her a cheque for ten pounds.

" May I ask you not to say a word of this to anyone until——"

" Until you give me leave. Be sure of that, and a thousand thanks to you. *You* have done me a kindness I'll not forget."

She turned on reaching the door and held out a card.

"Supposing you want me for evidence, hadn't you better take my address?"

"Good. I forgot in the satisfaction of securing the clue. Perhaps you could improve even on this, by writing me at once if you run across the lady again. If the chance should eventuate, keep her in sight."

Miss Rorke gave a curt, business-like nod and disappeared.

Dick clasped his palms together as if he would shake hands with himself.

"Was ever a case more complete? First a threatening letter, then a rehearsal with the boomerang—to keep her hand in, probably—then the attack. If the blessed thing had not struck me first through a thick overcoat and lessened its own impetus, I would be a dead man now. Wherever she is she has the marks of two dog bites and the loss of her boomerang to think about. Oh, if I could only find her track!"

CHAPTER THIRTY-SIX

Politeness plays second fiddle to necessity.

It was the redoubtable Torridge who found the track—at a “tube” station. The Louis d’Or was about to enter a carriage, but drew back hastily at sight of him, thereby colliding with another passenger, and calling attention to herself in the effort to get out.

Torridge sprang after her like a shot, and caught her arm on the platform.

“I’ve been looking for you everywhere, ma’am,” he said, raising his hat. “So’s some other people.”

Her light eyes looked fiendish, and she pulled her arm away; but he caught it a second time.

“Think again, ma’am, and take it quietly, because people are staring, and they’ll get interfering and bring a policeman; you know how interfering folk can be——”

“Let them.” She struggled, but could not free her arm. “I’ll give you in charge, fellow!”

Torridge thought he had never heard a human voice so nearly resembling a snake’s hiss; but he merely replied with a smile:

“Do. But then I would have to explain why I gripped a lady’s arm in public. Better come without fuss, ma’am.” He walked her quietly down the platform.

“What do you want with me?” she panted, finding herself at bay.

“Me? Lud! I don’t want anything; but I know someone who does.”

She made a quick movement, raising her arm to bring his hand near her teeth ; but he divined her intention and tightened his clutch so that she cried out with pain.

" If you try that trick again, I'll hand you over to justice. There's a warrant out for the boomerang artist. Promise to come quietly and I'll promise you a chance of freedom ; but if you make another struggle, cooey's the word for a policeman."

" Let go my arm and I'll come."

" Not much."

Though raging inwardly she had the sense to submit, and lookers-on merely saw what seemed to be a man holding his wife's arm. It was somewhat amusing, as the man was short and square and strong, the woman the very opposite. In this ludicrous plight they made their way to the lift, gained the street, where Torridge hailed a taxi.

" Get in, ma'am."

A policeman by the entrance watched them, and made a movement their way. The Louis d'Or obeyed, but in the taxi the snake's voice hissed again.

" I'll be revenged on you for this. No man insults me with impunity."

" Put it in writing, ma'am, like you did to Dick Heene. I'm taking you to his office."

" I'll not go ! " She made a dash at the door, but that herculean grip on her arm pulled her back.

" You just sit quiet and do as you're told, or it's cooey to the Crown prosecutor. The whole case is complete against you—I must say you muffed it badly. As a countrywoman of my own I wish you had shown more skill. The idea of giving a dress rehearsal in Richmond Park, as if it was a music-hall turn, and having your photos taken throwing the boomerang—oh, silly-billy ! "

The fine fair skin of her face turned a cadaverous tint.

"What—what does Heene want with me?" she gasped.

"You'll hear in five minutes, if he's in, ma'am; longer if he's out. I hope he's in—waiting is so jolly tiring."

Looena Merch remained silent, revolving possible plans for escape; but nothing presented itself. The taxi stopped at Heene's office, and Torridge, with the greatest politeness and a grip that would have done credit to a lion, ushered her upstairs and into the outer office, where Heene stood dictating. The words died on his tongue in amazement.

"I've brought you a lady you want to see very much," announced the Mayor of Locker Gully.

"Step inside," said Dick coolly, and they all moved together like a group of automatons. Dick offered a chair and remained standing. Torridge locked the door.

"What have you told Mrs. Merch?" asked Heene.

"Nothing much. She seemed disinclined for conversation; but I said if she came quietly I'd promise a chance of freedom."

"And I emphasize the promise if she—you, Mrs. Merch—will do certain things. If not, I'll telephone to the police-station."

She regarded him scornfully without replying. Both men credited her with venom enough for any revenge.

"Mrs. Merch, I'm willing to let you off the attack on my life if you'll do what I ask. It is compounding a felony, I am aware; but no one save ourselves will be the wiser."

This time she laughed, a laugh that matched the snake's hiss.

"You assume that I attacked you because I was stupid enough to send a threatening letter, and because this fool here——"

"That's me," interjected Torridge cheerfully.

"Knew I could throw the boomerang. On no

more evidence than that you submit me to ignominy and——”

“Never mind that now. The point is—will you do what I ask? It is to hand over the Engadee estate to its rightful owner, as you promised your husband on his deathbed?”

“No, I’m d——d if I will!” said the Louis d’Or.

“Then I’ll keep my word since you’ll not keep yours. I give you five minutes to decide.”

There was a whining and scratching at the door, and a short bark.

“Here’s one witness against you,” said Dick, unlocking the door. “Snuff!”

The little white mongrel trotted in, wagged his tail at sight of Torridge, but the presence of a lady pulled him up short. He sniffed at her skirts, which she pulled away and rose to her feet in fright. At the same moment the dog snarled and leapt up at her, but Heene caught him round the body.

“He’ll not bite you again, Mrs. Merch; but you see he remembers. Go and lie down, Snuff.”

But that was what Snuff wouldn’t do. He kept within a yard of the hated presence, snarling and showing his teeth, until Heene put him out of the room.

“Perhaps you may recognize these.” He handed her the snapshots. “They were taken unawares as you rehearsed with the boomerang in Richmond Park.”

“It’s a lie!”

“Like all my other statements, madam, it can be proved. Now will you give up Engadee?”

“No!”

“Then it’s the police.”

He moved to the telephone on his desk, and the same instant the Louis d’Or sprang to the window, flung it up and leapt out.

“Good God! She’ll be dashed to pieces!” cried Torridge, rushing after her. Dick almost fell forward in the effort to stop what was impossible.

They looked down with horror-stricken eyes, white with fear and expecting to see her crushed and broken on the flagged court below. Instead, all they caught sight of was the whisk of a skirt disappearing out of the narrow entrance !

A man stood gaping below.

" She dropped down the spout, guvnor ! " he said, pointing. Both Heene and Torridge burst into a roar of laughter at the way they had been outwitted.

CHAPTER THIRTY-SEVEN

An old woman's will and a young woman's wit soon part company.

APRIL came finding Dick a little more hopeful, a little harder at work, a little less isolated. He still carried out the Saturday tramp in Richmond Park, with Snuff at his heels.

Snuff was not his only companion now. Various acquaintances joined him, discussing the problems of the universe, in frantic accord or in equally frantic opposition, none of them particularly well read, though they were all keen-brained, with the daring comprehension of youth.

The boomerang scare was dead. Nobody else had been struck; whoever the thrower was, anarchist, aboriginal, or apache, he was a terror no longer.

Dick did not inform the police of the Louis d'Or's criminality. For one thing he hated to hand a woman over to the law. Fiend though she was, the tie of countryhood bound them, and he guessed that she would be her own punishment.

Her apprehension regarding possible capture would keep her in a state of alarm wherever she was.

Nora Diss corresponded fitfully, and Dick fancied these occasional communications held a note of dissatisfaction, or weariness, he could not tell which.

Lady Rose had settled on a furnished house within the sacred precincts of Berkeley Square, and was appraising the various fleshpots of Egypt.

Whatever a London season might cost other people, Lady Rose carried a magician's baton in her brain, and waved tradesmen's tarradiddles to the vanishing point.

Nora possessed a housekeeping knack that was stifled for lack of use, and her natural clearheadedness saw into Lady Rose's methods. At first it gave her something of a shock to find a woman of title stooping to petty meanness, but the magician's baton waved these misgivings aside. People expected so much from rank, never really considering how really poor rank was, and the incessant calls upon it.

"They demand the privileges of the feudal system, my dear, without its penalties."

Nora was hazy about the feudal system, save the usual school jumble of ideas; but she did know that the cost of all this was coming out of her stepfather's pocket, and began to ponder on the worth of it.

The furnished flat was nothing more or less than a set of boxes to a girl accustomed to plenty of room. The furnished house did not give much promise of improvement. She was just a trifle discontented. A girl who has trained a Little Noah's Ark Limited is scarcely likely to find calling and card-leaving much of a substitute.

"Why on earth hadn't I the sense to come on my own?" she wrote to a friend. "I don't see what a girl of 22 wants with a chaperon. It's not as if I were likely to make a fool of myself over a man; as for this social scrambling, it gives me the nightmare. If mother were not such a bad sailor, how different the trip would be. Excepting snippety snaps of rural England, I haven't been to one place that I long for. Lady Rose has the motor for the season; but instead of becoming acquainted with the beauties and wonders of London, I am whirled round to the silliest people by way of fixing up the scaffolding for my social success, people with a fixed smile of tolerance and curiosity. Sooner or later I'll buck; I know I shall."

The "bucking" process occurred a day or two after.

"I'm going to Westminster Abbey this morning," announced Nora at breakfast. Once she would have shown some deference to the elder lady's wishes; but as that lady never deferred to anybody, Nora adopted the same tactics. It was not the first time she had spoken of a visit to the Abbey. Up till now she had allowed herself to be overruled.

"But I am expecting someone about the house."

"You'll not require me as lady-in-waiting."

"Of course not; but I've telephoned for the motor afterwards."

"Oh, you can have the motor. I'll go by bus."

"Bus! *Alone*—my dear!"

"What's wrong in a bus, and being alone?"

"Nothing; but these little matters get talked about, and people will think you are not so well dowered as I am trying to make out."

"Then don't try to make out," laughed Nora. "What on earth is it to do with anybody?"

Lady Rose's stare grew stony.

"In one sense nothing, of course; but as your people expect me to pave the way for your future, I must attend to all such points. A girl of your striking appearance running about alone must cause comment, and, well—it may interfere with your invitations."

Nora faced the situation squarely. The stony blue eyes held no scorn for her now, since she was familiar with the sham of them.

"Lady Rose, I think we must reconsider our position. Don't rate me as unappreciative, for I feel grateful for your kindness in taking me up. But I never have been anything but open in expressing myself; it is my nature, and so far I am not satisfied with my visit to England. I want to see so much more than I do; I want to mingle with the world, not a mere crevice of it. I *have* a mind, and for all the good I'm doing with it I might be an absolute idiot. So, henceforth, I intend

to spend my mornings roaming over London, really seeing this wonderful old place. I have asked you many times to go with me, but you have put me off. Now I must go by myself. Whatever arrangements you think necessary to make for me in the afternoons or evenings will be attended to equally well; but I may as well warn you that I don't see the least good to come out of it all."

"A girl who has not yet passed the threshold of English social life cannot be expected to see with the eyes of one who is in the middle of everything."

"Perhaps for that reason the girl on the threshold has the clearer vision. She is not smothered by the crush inside."

"Nora, you must respect the conventions."

"With all my heart, if I only knew what they are, in good honest black and white. Before breaking the conventions, Lady Rose, you must get a clear idea of their meaning, so as to understand what you are really damaging. If going to the Abbey alone on a bus roof is a social crime, well, then, I glory in my sin, and if you feel I am doing you a discredit, you must—drop me."

Lady Rose ignored this and proceeded:

"You can of course follow your own fancies without interference from me. Still, I protest. I am somewhat in the light of a mother to you——"

"Then come along with me and improve your own stock of ideas. You know nothing, or next to nothing, about London—you said so yourself—except the right people for a visiting list. Now give yourself a holiday and let's go on the top of a bus together."

Lady Rose silently accentuated her stare. She had never been on the top of a bus in her life.

"It's just heaven," said Nora. "I only wish they had a third tier, or a trolley elevator round the roofs."

No more passed. In great spirits the girl prepared

for her independent excursion ; climbed the nearest bus ; then suddenly changed her mind and scrambled down.

" I'm going to see Dick Heene," she said to herself. " It's my first holiday, and it shall be Australian."

Thus Dick Heene found his solid business ideas whirling round like leaves in autumn when a tall, radiant young woman walked in, covering her unexpected presence with a half-bashful, wholly cheerful—

" I hope you'll not mind my surprise party ; it's really my first day out."

He placed a chair for her, wondering to himself at the thumping of his heart. Did she care for him after all, to come like this ?

" Do I frighten you ? " she asked, noticing his silence. " You scrutinize me so, I hope you don't think my first visit is improper ? "

" Your visit gives me more happiness than I have had since I have been in England. The office ought to get new paint and paper to commemorate the event. But why do you call it your first day out ? You've been in town a good deal."

" Playing the fool—yes."

" Don't you like London, Nora ? "

" London ! Dick, I would give my very ears and eyes to know London, to be able to say ' Up that street Charles the First was led to his doom,' or ' In that house Dr. Johnson lived and wrote his dictionary,' or ' Here stood old Temple Bar ' ; but I don't know a blessed thing about the great grey city of fairyland. It's not quite all my fault ; but to-day I shook off the shackles and rode on the top of a bus, meaning to go to Westminster Abbey—and came here instead."

" I'm glad I'm more interesting than the Abbey. Tell me what you have been doing."

She spoke of her experiences brightly enough ; but of the social side she said but little. It might sound snobbish to Dick Heene. They were both wooing

London from different standpoints ; he from a city office that suggested no interest in Mayfair and fashion.

"What's this mystery you've been hinting at in your letters?" she asked suddenly.

"Hasn't your mother—Mrs. Ireton—said anything?"

"No—what? Has mother written to you?"

"I've written to her; but though the matter is most important, her reply is rather disappointing."

He detailed his experiences with regard to Engadee; while she listened, silent and wondering, asking a question occasionally, staring in sheer bewilderment when he came to an end. Of his recent encounter with the Louis d'Or he did not speak, merely alluding to her as the widow of the late owner of the property.

"Fancy mother never saying a word about all this, or dad either, though, of course, he's only my step-father. Yet he is just the sort to take it up."

"Nora, I want to ask you a very personal question. It has nothing to do with me, but—but as I have been mentioned as a probable purchaser for Engadee, the question may not appear so bad as from a stranger. Do you think your people are in a position to carry on a lawsuit that may demand a sustained fight?"

"Why, yes," she answered slowly, as if the matter puzzled her for the first time. "Dad is wealthy."

Now Dick was aware from a conversation with Maurice Darley that the Iretons lived up to the very limit of their means, if not beyond.

"The legal machinery ought to be set at work," he said. "There's Mrs. Ireton's letter, merely a polite acknowledgment of mine, and an intimation of placing the affair in her solicitor's hands."

"It—is—queer," mused Nora. "Mum ought to write to me as well as write again to you. What on earth are they doing? Perhaps the other side are hooking them into a lot of correspondence to see what proofs they have. Mum is a bit too easy-going. Do

you mind if I write to her, saying you have told me everything? "

"Do, do, by all means."

"Then I will. And Dick, there's another matter, Uncle Maurice. I would love to see him, but he has never spoken to mum for years."

"Let me bring you together," suggested Dick. "A little dinner or something?"

"Jolly. But what about Lady Rose? I don't care. There surely can't be any harm dining with one's own flesh and blood."

"He's all you have on this side of the world, isn't he?"

"There's Mr. Bernard Ireton away on a holiday, and I can't make his wife out from her letters. There are some others, relations of father's, somewhere in Whitehall—no, Whitechapel. But Lady Rose says it's a dreadful place, where no decent person dare go."

"Oh, rubbish. I'll take you there any time you want or Darley will. What are they?"

"Diss is the name, they have a brush and broom manufactory. I used to feel the want of relatives very keenly when first I came, not so much now. Perhaps I'll not go. I can't tell."

She was oppressed with the memory of her mentor's disdainful comment:

"My dear! You couldn't possibly rake up connections like that. Probably they live like costers."

Nora's ideas of costers were derived from a visit to a music-hall where a famous impersonator sang and danced and made merry in his millions of glittering buttons. She understood they hawked vegetables with donkeys in the intervals of song and dance, and to couple her father's relations with people of this class frightened her.

"Can you lunch with me to-day?" Heene's voice aroused her from her musing.

"No. I have an engagement; but fix up something

soon, and let me see Uncle Maurice. Tell him about me, Dick."

She rose in her swift fashion, offering her hand and shaking his cordially.

"I hope you are doing well, Dick. You deserve good luck."

"I think so too," he laughed.

He remembered when she had gone that she was quite ignorant of his business, save the fragmentary references he himself had made in his letters.

CHAPTER THIRTY-EIGHT

Nature knows her worshippers and reveals herself without the aid of sunlight.

IN her passionate love for English things, and eagerness to discover hidden spots, Nora Diss found more enjoyment than in the acquaintances she was forming.

The England of her schooldays, when the hard and fast details of history were linked up with the romance of those who took part in them, began to have actual life now.

Certain old words appealed to her imagination, especially the names of London, and if left to herself she would have pored over their derivation by the hour.

The visits and visitations amongst Lady Rose's friends were slow and solemn and stately, going on year in, year out, for all eternity. Nobody seemed particularly glad to see Lady Rose again after her visit to the Antipodes; nobody seemed glad when she left.

Nora drew what pleasure she could from these new associations. The grander the entourage the less impression it made on her, because she was shrewd enough to read the meaning. Generally these upholders of style were Lady Rose's bantlings, anxious to shine at all costs.

But there were some houses where the domestic machinery knew no modern flaunting of wealth, but was part of a system old as time; even the furniture was changeless. There was some strange fascination

in this link with the long ago that attested the contrast between a world-old but ageless England and her hurry-scurrying offspring overseas.

One visit in particular sharpened her faculties for observation. The hostess was of Lady Rose's kin, with all the qualities of a past generation conserved to the present. There was straitness of means and expenditure visible, but the atmosphere of dignified leisure rose above the sordid commonplaces of life.

No attempt was made at entertainment and there were no young people in the family, yet the Australian enjoyed the three days beyond any other visit, roaming about unrestrainedly and finding recurrent delight in every feature of the estate.

"I wish you wouldn't show such childish eagerness," said Lady Rose. "These things are open to any tourist; my cousin will *think* it odd."

"She told me that she loved people to take a vital interest in England, and hoped it was not merely a passing curiosity with me. She advised me to cultivate the liking until it became part of my nature."

"Oh, she lives in the past."

"That's just what I'm trying to do."

There was an oriel window where the girl loved to dream, absorbed in her surroundings, drinking in the grey mistiness of the landscape, or gazing about the long wainscotted room, with its many doors that shut in queer lopsided staircases or capacious cupboards. The pictures were in keeping, worthless for the most part, yet not to be denied the power of realizing a bygone day and generation. They must have all possessed life histories, red-letter days and days of desolation, quarrels, frets, and foolishness, like the rest of us, yet the past shut them in with a curtain of shadows.

Sweeping the oriel window with its foliage was an old elm tree, the trysting place of so many courtings that its very branches held the memory of partings and

good-byes and breakings of heart, until they became a sighing amongst the leaves.

The tree held the message of spring. It tapped against the oriel window, week in, week out, to say the spring was creeping up from the south, until the ivy on the wall grew jealous, and made desperate encroachment around the window, only to be brushed aside by the elm branches. A strand of honeysuckle and a rose climber that might otherwise have been at peace got involved in the fray, and had their growth retarded by the conflict.

The birds alone were disinterested, denuding the ivy of its berries and searching for insects in the tree. The ivy was always victorious, for it clutched the window frame at last and found a foothold beside the stained glass, where it wondered at the gorgeous reflection of its leaves ; but the elm shot out new twigs in front of the window and had the best view.

Through winter storm, spring shower, and summer shine, a subdued song hummed in its branches :

Though spring is late, it is sure to come, be cheery.

The southern girl who was waiting for the sun took heart.

Beyond the elm was a slope aglow with wild daffodils swaying in the breeze. From a little distance wild daffodils always suggest fairy revellers that have not had time to disappear before dawn overtook them. They wag their delicate heads so wisely and could tell so much about the weather. Close your eyes for a second and the waving pale gold stars will vanish.

Under a hawthorn hedge grew herbs once prized in old-time remedies, though forgotten now, and amongst the tangle appeared a few wayside blossoms where it was warmest and most sheltered. The hawthorn itself was only forming into bud. It would not be ready by May Day. Nora wondered whether Mother

Nature ever got angry with her children for not being up to time. Or was it her own fault?

A river swelled from a pearly thread to a shining expanse of steel mirroring the clouds. The dark earth of its banks took on a silver glisten from recent showers, and against the background of smouldering flame in the west a little grey church marked the highest point of the landscape, giving that sense of peace characteristic of rural England.

The oriel window had looked on the same view since it was fashioned ; for hundreds of years time had stood still, but the restless spirit of modernity was not to be denied toll at last in the form of a railway station, utilitarian and unlovely by day, yet adding beauty to the night, when its lights were like a bouquet of jewels flung up high against the sky.

The Australian girl cherished the memory of the scene above all others because of the oriel window and the essentially English character of the whole. It helped her to realize the dear homeland, the latent dream that is such a resistless force in the children of the Southern Cross.

From the window a straggling path led to a lake. One morning Nora strolled on, watching the rippling mosaic made by the fallen leaves on the water, peering into the recesses of a little wood. Locally this was called a spinney, and in her ears the name was an added charm. She loved the sound of it, and in these April days stole in delight among the bare trees, where the mists of bygone winters lingered ever ready to absorb another like the mists of memory.

An old swan house creaked with the wind and the lapping of the waves, its timbers grey and slimy and green, and a water-logged boat nosed a huge boulder.

Kine grazed in a field across the lake, spectral shapes in the evanescent mist, a chilly picture of an early April day, with only one glint of warmth in the red cottage roofs.

The slight movement of the water recalled an odd belief someone had expressed on the voyage.

"All this twist and twirl of the waves represents the lettering of a language beyond our powers of understanding. If we could form all that weird rolling into one word that word would represent destiny."

Nora had laughed with the rest at the time, but now the quietude, with the faint lap, lap of the lake as the only sound, aroused a wish to penetrate the mysteries that nature guards. What did the ripples mean? What destiny could they foreshadow?

She bent slightly over the water and saw herself reflected. On her head was a crown of white flowers with something filmy that suggested a veil. In surprise she put her hands to her head to feel if her fur toque was still there. Then, reassured, she looked down again at the water only to note another change, for it was rippling now with pale sunshine.

Subsequently her hostess enlightened her with obvious pride in the possession of a legendary lake.

"It is called 'Saint Sylva's Pool,' and on certain days in early spring a vision of the future is revealed. From what you tell me I think your white headdress means a wedding veil, and that before the year is out" She smiled in a kind way, for these records were intertwined with her years.

"But the sunshine?" asked Nora. "There was no sunshine to-day, or not just then."

"The sunshine is significant, at least to my thinking. It presages happiness. Or perhaps it indicates the sunshine of your own country."

Nora stole down to Saint Sylva's Pool a second time, but saw nothing at all. The guardian of the pool was not inclined to reveal overmuch.

CHAPTER THIRTY-NINE

The road to the Wishing-Gate is the most frequented road in the world, yet all the travellers are invisible.

A DIRECT result of Lady Rose's efforts on behalf of her *protégée* was the interest vouchsafed by her relations, a numerous clan, remarkable for their encumbered estates, and their professed struggle to exist.

But the interest in the Australian was laconic, and Nora took umbrage at the patronizing tone.

"You are not one of us; you never can be one of us; but we will give you our countenance."

So ran the formula. The countenance consisted of invitations for week-ends in the country and luncheons in town.

Nora met many people without finding a chum amongst the dozens of high-born damsels, or indeed anyone to whom she could open her heart.

Then suddenly the horizon widened, the colourless sky grew bright and clear, and a dawn of new doings set in.

The young man known as "Hubert Peyton" reappeared, a shade more dandified than on board ship, owing probably to new clothes, for he had clung persistently to tourist garments on his travels.

After some fitful thought as to whether he would revive his acquaintance with Nora Diss, or go off to investigate an offered territory in Canada, he decided to call on Lady Rose.

On the *Soleil* he was distinctly impressed with the

Australian, on land the impression faded ; but he found himself comparing other girls with her, girls of his own station who were clearly manœuvred by their mothers. He saw them in a row with arms extended, behind them a more solid-looking female phalanx. They were all so anxious for the ducal prize that the one who gave no thought whatever to the prize naturally engaged his curiosity. Then the explanation dawned on him and he smiled to himself.

“Of course she has no idea of a title. I’m plain Hubert Peyton to her, unless Lady Rose has given me away, and that doesn’t look likely. Probably she’s just the same as all the rest.”

So he meditated in such wisdom as the world had taught him, for every young man understands his matrimonial value. Women have helped him to this attitude.

In London the duke lived bachelor fashion in a by no means expensive flat. With a shooting box in Scotland, and a yacht in the Solent, he managed to set himself free of the burden of housekeeping, though he did not shun his responsibilities. He only objected to useless expenditure and did not allow himself to be cheated.

The home of his ancestors was let to a wealthy coal magnate ; other minor possessions were also made to pay for their keep. His tastes were simple enough to cause a raising of the eyebrows, yet his tenants held him in admiration for the same trait, because it helped to make him a good and just landlord. Extensive travel set its mark upon him, and, if little of a reader, his easy way of mixing with the world resulted in clear-headed knowledge of what was going on around him.

The London season offered no attraction. Besides, it was always there—to a duke ; and he settled on Canada, then hesitated and looked up two or three acquaintances, among them—Lady Rose.

The footman said she was in. Finding out his mistake he took counsel from Nora Diss.

"Perhaps it's an appointment; say she'll soon return."

The footman reappeared with the intimation that the Duke of Reith would be pleased if Miss Diss could spare him a few minutes to say good-bye, as he was leaving shortly for Canada.

"I don't know any dukes," said Nora to herself, as she went into the drawing-room full of wonder to see what this particular specimen might be.

A young man was glancing at some photographs and turned to greet her.

"Mr. Peyton?"

"Quite so, Miss Diss. How d'you do?"

Nora gave him her hand, staring down at him from her superior inches.

"Are you the Duke of Reith?"

"Yes. Peyton's my family name."

"Ah, title too much bother at sea; you wanted to travel as light as possible."

He noted that beyond her first stare she was not flustered, and her gay humour caught at the incident.

"If one wants to enjoy the world like other men," he said sagely, "you've got to be like other men."

"That's the point of view of a title, because it's something new to be minus the title. Now to me, I would like it the other way round."

"To have a title?"

"To be a great nob, and see how it felt for my patrician shoulders to rub against all other sorts and sizes of shoulders."

She observed him thoughtfully.

"You kept it up well. Lady Rose must have known, yet she never said a word. That's rather cheap of her."

"I asked her not to. I wanted to be free from fuss."

Nora commenced to laugh softly, and the laugh

lengthened. Then he, too, joined in, and it became a peal of mirth.

"I haven't had a laugh like that for ages," he said.

"Nor I. It's bad form, isn't it, to allow your emotions to carry you away? Only I'm an Australian, and not supposed to have knowledge of these things."

The Duke of Reith's sense of championship was aroused.

"Laugh when you want to, that's my idea."

"I haven't wanted to laugh much, to tell the truth."

"Aren't you enjoying the visit?"

It was much the same question that Dick Heene had put in his office, yet what a world lay between.

"I'm enjoying it more now, since I've decided to be myself, and run about to see for myself. Look what I bought for a penny!"

She took a mechanical grasshopper from her bag and set it springing about the floor.

"I suppose you never dreamed there were penny hawkers in existence."

"Oh, come, I'm not such a ninny as all that."

"I bet you do not know as much of London as I do."

"I bet I do."

They broke into animated comparison of their knowledge amidst a good deal of laughter that reached the ears of the domestics and made them wink.

"When do you go to Canada?" asked Nora, remembering the first form of his message.

"Eh? Oh, I haven't decided."

The duke had temporarily forgotten Canada. The mention of it now returned with a start, and at the back of his brain a thought arose that Canada could wait.

Nora began to laugh again.

"I'm thinking of the letter I offered to give you to my dad. Fancy a duke after a billet. Still, you wouldn't be the first. We've had lots; I don't mean dukes, but younger sons who wanted experience and

hadn't a penny to bless themselves with. They always sink the title, but it gets round that they are out of the common, and they are all dubbed 'dukes.' "

"Are Australians fond of titles?"

"Now, isn't every English nation fond of titles? Or every other nation for the matter of that. Else, why should they bother about titles? I'm glad to know a duke. I'll make quite an interesting yarn of it for my chums out there. You'll give me your picture, will you not? Signed, no, not ducally—you just put the one word, isn't that so? Well, I don't want that. Write 'Hubert Peyton'; then I can expatiate. Perhaps this sounds snobbish. After all, I daresay you are used to being run after?"

He coloured slightly and looked rather sheepish.

Nora thought he considered her rude and continued:

"Lady Rose says there's an enormous difference between the upbringing of English girls and other nations. The younger the nation the more assertive the inhabitants, but I can't see any unpleasantness in it, perhaps just because I'm an Australian and believe in my country. Anyhow, I'm not going to change. I tried to at first, but found I was making an ass of myself. Why should I lose all the fun of life simply because one small set of people consider emotion to belong to savages and such like? It's not natural for me to sit like a cat in pickle, and I'll not try."

"I should like my sister to meet you," he said. "She talks something like that—a bit of a Socialist, you know, humanitarian and that kind of thing; rags me for not taking life more seriously, prophesies class extinction, wholesale levelling and the Lord knows what."

"Eh? A woman of rank talk like that?"

"Bless you, lots of 'em are at it. It's a new fad, only in her case it's sincere. She does try to live up to her views."

"But that's splendid, isn't it?"

"If she likes it, it's her look-out. There's no need to make other people miserable over it."

Lady Rose entered, somewhat nettled to find matters were progressing without her manoeuvring, and tea was brought in.

Since Nora had definitely kicked over the traces in her sight-seeing expeditions, the subject was not alluded to. Now it came up again. Youth lured youth as in the laughing hours on the *Soleil*, and the Englishman derived more entertainment from a stranger's point of view than he ever did from his friends.

"I never thought you took an interest in these things," he innocently remarked to Lady Rose.

"Neither do I. I haven't been to one of them."

"I go about alone—on the bus roof," explained Nora. "We have a judge in Melbourne who said the only way to see London was from the top of a bus, and to keep on at it by the week together. His advice has borne fruit you see."

"Couldn't I go with you one day?" he asked.

"Delighted to chaperon you. Let me take you to the Abbey to-morrow. You can't commence your education too early, and I don't suppose you know a thing about it, save at coronations and christenings, do you?"

"Something near the truth," he laughed.

"In that case I think I had better accompany you," said Lady Rose.

CHAPTER FORTY

When kinship waves her wand of authority, hearts fly
to arms.

THEN suddenly before the season commenced, before even the scramble for invitations began, Nora Diss started to make friends, quite of her own accord and without any expense to Lady Rose.

Fame blew her trumpet in an unexpected way. Her talent for originating festivities had attracted the attention of an Australian Governor's wife, and Nora was asked to arrange a " Daughters of the Sun " and a " Men of the Moon " stall for a charity bazaar to take place in the full tide of the season.

Before this could eventuate Nora again broke out of bounds by reviving all sorts of old acquaintances, rich and poor, high and humble, to the consternation of her chaperon.

" You'll negative all the good I can do," she said frankly.

Nora's politeness was of the sugary kind, though it caused some gritting of teeth.

" If I'm a discredit to you, Lady Rose, you must drop me. But I like old friends, and I'm not going to drop *them*."

People began to talk of her dash and spirit. A leading actress wrote for an original dress idea, a society manager asked her to explain something he had heard about Little Noah's Ark Limited.

Nora was established as a come-to-stay personage ;

a dozen different ladies would have taken her up as a novelty. Lady Rose was not the primary power she expected to be. More, the expenses that were coming from Joseph Ireton's pocket need never have been incurred ; to crown all, Nora was out of hand.

The spirit of independence was impelling her to clearer vision ; the shibboleth that constituted Lady Rose's means of existence loomed more and more of a query with the Australian.

She set the seal on her revolt by deciding to seek her Whitechapel kinsfolk without help from anyone. It was characteristic that she gave no thought to all the small matters intervening.

It never occurred to her to write to them first ; she only accused herself of rank snobbery in not looking them up before. Her kind nature prompted her to take a gift of some kind, but she was quite ignorant of the size or sex of the family. They might be young men or young women, married, single, widowed ; or the brush and broom manufacturer mentioned in the directory might be sole survivor, or he might be dead, leaving the business to be carried on in his name. Nora could scarcely take a bunch of roses to a business. Such were the thoughts that climbed on one another's shoulders, perplexing, though not affecting her resolve.

"I'll see it through, anyway." From regard to Whitechapel's reputation, which allowed your umbrella to be stolen at one end of the street, and resold to you at the other, she attired herself in her plainest coat and skirt.

A taxi was summoned. It required a little nerve to tell the driver where to go, for in her ignorance she imagined Whitechapel a prescribed region even to the Jehus of Mayfair. For a moment she hesitated, thinking of telling him to drive to Liverpool Street, whence she would walk the rest of the way, for she had pored over a map to impress the locality on her mind.

But she whipped herself up with another reflection

on her own snobbishness, and said clearly, "Whitechapel Road." He showed no more surprise than if the words had been "Rotten Row," and she marvelled at his indifference.

Lady Rose's footman, who overheard the order, manifested no notice either.

Nora, in a state of trepidation, kept keen watch from the windows of the vehicle for the first appearance of suspicious folk. The driver went some distance along Whitechapel Road, then stopped.

"What number, lady? This is Whitechapel Road," he added, seeing her surprise.

Nora was staring at a tolerably wide and busy street. Not far off were some trimly-kept gardens and a church. There were no signs of burglars, murderers, or other marauders, nor even a street fight. People went and came on their business. There were even ladies in motors.

"It's Diss Place, I want. A brush and broom manufactory."

"Hi! Do you know where Diss Place is?" he called to a messenger boy.

"Straight in front."

With a beating heart Nora looked out and saw a lane with a large four-story brick building running its length.

JAMES DISS.

Brush and Broom Manufacturer.

CHAPTER FORTY-ONE

There are spots in busiest London as calm as the backwaters of a country river.

MARVELLING greatly, she alighted and paid the driver, who still manifested no surprise. If he thought anything about it at all it was that his fare was interested in brooms.

Nora walked up the lane with head erect and stately tread, conscious of two marble players' comment :

" My ! Ain't she a pleecemen of a gal ! "

" I wish to see Mr. James Diss," she said to a workman at the entrance.

" In the office, m'iss," he directed. She went through a forest of brooms to a glass-partitioned room, where a grey-headed man was giving orders to a typist, much in the style of other business men.

" Mr. James Diss ? "

He came forward at once, wondering at his visitor.

" I believe you are a relative of my father, who left England for Australia over thirty years ago."

After the different speeches she had rehearsed in thought this was all she could say when the fateful moment arrived.

Mr. James Diss did not seem astonished.

" One of the family did go to Australia years ago. I suppose he would be a sort of cousin ; anyway he was my father's brother's son, but I never saw him or his father."

"My father came from Manchester," said Nora, somewhat chilled by his matter-of-factness.

"Quite right. Our branch settled in London. I don't think my father saw his brother since they were boys. I know he never heard from him, so he concluded he must be dead, and he knew nothing of the son."

"My father was no letter-writer and never kept up a correspondence with anyone. He died many years ago. But he spoke sometimes of his people in the old country, so I made up my mind to come and see you, now that I am on a visit to London."

"I'm very pleased to see you, miss, I'm sure."

The "miss" struck oddly from a relative and she fancied he regarded her with suspicion, which was a guess near the truth, for the business man was chary of relatives who dropped out of the skies. He supposed she wanted to borrow money.

"Are there any other relatives?" she asked, considerably taken aback by this reception.

"There's one, first officer of a South American liner, but he's too grand for us. We're just plain folk, you see, making our way quietly."

This was a hint that there was no money to spare. Nora gazed round the office, uncertain whether to go or stay. Her eyes unconsciously rested on the typist, who was staring hard.

"My name's Diss," she broke in, "Nelly Diss. I suppose we're cousins."

Nora held out her hand.

"My eldest daughter," explained the manufacturer, not too well pleased at the interruption in business hours. Then an idea struck him.

"Nell, take the young lady round to the house. She might like to see the missis."

Nelly Diss jumped up and beckoned Nora out. She was small and dark, with pretty hair and eyes.

"Come along this way. Oh, you needn't say good-bye to dad; he'll be in for tea."

Nora followed through the back of the factory, where every stage in the life of a broom was in evidence, and where the eyes of a dozen workgirls watched what went on.

They emerged on a flagged yard, leading to a tall, narrow house overtopped by scores of chimneys.

"Mother," said Nelly Diss, turning the handle, "here's a cousin from Australia. She's the daughter of the one that went to Australia that grandfather used to talk about. Is tea ready?"

Mrs. Diss appeared, a little managing creature in neat black, looking not much older than her daughter.

"How do you do?" she said, offering her hand. "Sit down. I wish I had known you were coming."

Nora felt awkward, and her knack of conversation failed. Nelly Diss never removed her gaze, sombre, wondering, impassive.

"It's pretty hot in Australia, isn't it?"

Nora outlined the weather chart; but the mother cut in with more important matter.

"Did Diss do any good out there?"

She could not have told whether the one-time relative's name was Tom, Dick or Harry.

"Fairly well; but father was not the temperament to make money. Too easy-going."

"I suppose you are over for the trip? Are you staying with friends or in a boarding-house?"

"With friends."

Nelly Diss fired off a number of questions about the voyage. Here a young man entered and another girl.

"My son James and my youngest daughter Maggie."

Nora rose to shake hands while Nelly explained:

"This is a relative of grandfather's from Australia, the daughter of the one that went there over thirty years ago."

"It's pretty hot in Australia, isn't it?" said James Diss the younger.

Nora wanted to scream at this everlasting remark, but managed to appear affable.

The tea was brought in : a huge tin teapot, with a glass sugar basin and milk jug, equally gargantuan. Another tray followed, bearing a pile of large cups and saucers and plates and a mound of bread and butter cut in thick slabs. A second tray beside it revealed slabs covered with jam, sandwich fashion. It looked like a meal for a big family. Mrs. Diss saw her visitor's surprise and explained :

" We always give our factory hands tea."

" It is very kind of you."

" No, it is only right. They work well and deserve proper treatment. Besides, it knits us all together, master and man. You see we take tea out of the one tin teapot. Got it made purposely. If you'd come on Sunday you'd have seen us using the silver one, more by way of keeping it rubbed up than anything else, for the tea is just the same."

" It is a splendid idea," and Nora really thought so. She began to have a feeling of respect for these people who looked after their workers.

Mrs. Diss and her daughters poured out the tea. Then Nelly Diss opened the front door and rang a bell. Two of the " hands " crossed the yard at once and the huge trays were taken out to them, with cups fresh and full and fragrant.

" They get a quarter of an hour teatime," said Nelly. " Sit at the table, will you ? "

Nora was glad to follow the suggestion, for the handling of the plateful of bread and jam, as well as the liberal teacup, needed some dexterity.

James Diss joined them and took his seat at the lower end of the table.

" God give us an appetite for our food now and always," he said reverently.

" Amen ! " chorused the family in various smothered voices. Nora expected to hear a noise made in drinking,

but there was none ; nor did they champ their food, nor commit any breach of table etiquette.

" I suppose you find it pretty hot where you come from ? " remarked James Diss. His tone was a trifle more urbane than before, as if he felt his suspicions unjust. Ere Nora could again describe the vagaries of Australian weather, a shout of laughter went up from outside.

" Must see what's up," exclaimed the son, and draining his cup he rushed away.

Nora would have liked to hear the reason of the laugh as enlivening to this tea party inside.

" What did Diss die of ? " asked the head of the family.

" He caught a cold and it turned to pneumonia."

" Fancy having pneumonia out there with all that heat," said Mrs. Diss in utter amazement.

" Any family besides you ? "

" No. Mother married again when I was quite small, and her husband, Mr. Ireton, has been like a father to me."

" I like to hear a girl speak well of her stepfather."

" What's he do ? " asked Maggie Diss.

" Who ? Dad ? Oh, he's a pastoralist."

" That's sheep and things, isn't it ? "

" Yes."

" And Diss ? Was that what he did too ? I shouldn't have thought he knew anything about sheep or land. Still, Manchester men always fall on their feet."

" It must have cost a heap of money to come to England," said Nelly.

" Mr. Ireton is giving me the trip."

" Oh, the old people are not over with you, then ? "

" No. Mr. Ireton says he likes Australia best and mother is a bad sailor."

" I've heard such lots of people say they like Australia best," commented James Diss. His wife assented.

"So've I, and I can't make it out. One would think they would be glad to get away from a land of savages and blacks and bushrangers ; but there's no accounting for taste."

"Well, I must go," said James Diss, looking at his watch and rising. "Come Nelly, come Maggie. My girls have to work in the office, miss, so they'll have a living in their fingers if I went under to-morrow. I'll bid you good afternoon ; I'm glad to have seen you."

He shook hands cordially enough and went off without any more talk. The girls came to her.

"Sorry we didn't see more of you," said Nelly.

"Remember me to the kangaroos," from Maggie.

"We've all got to hustle," remarked the mother as they departed and a maid carried off the remains of the tea. "I wish you could have come on Sunday, as then we could have spent more time together."

Nora took the hint.

"I think it most kind of you, Mrs. Diss, to receive me as you have done without any formality, after taking you unawares."

"Tush, it doesn't matter." She shook hands in a friendly way, looking very tiny besides her visitor's stature. "If you should be round this way on a Sunday look us up again. We'll be glad to see you."

The son darted forward as Nora left the front door.

"Excuse me rushing off, Miss Diss, but I had to see what was going on. Now I'll take you to your tram. Be sure you look us up when you're round this way again. Sunday's best, as we've all got to graft on week-days, and the guv'nor's a bit down on slackers. Here's the tram ; it was jolly of you to come. Good-bye."

Nora took her seat in the tram until the first stop, then she alighted and sought out the nearest florist's, where she chose the best obtainable and sent them to Mrs. Diss and her daughters.

CHAPTER FORTY-TWO

Love is not always umpire ; sometimes leisure counts.

THE Duke of Reith began to wonder whether a man should study his own views or those of his order in choosing a wife. The attraction of a flirtation depends on its novelty. If the novelty has the power to stimulate, the eventuating love affair acquires a matrimonial tinge, though the colour is not guaranteed to last.

His ideas about a future duchess were by no means hazy. Wealth did not figure among them, for he held no high regard for money ; but beauty was essential, and brains were bracketed with beauty. Youth was not an asset. Sometimes he thought he would like a mate older than himself. He admired the celebrated women who headed Salons in a past France ; he even gave a nod of approval to the wirepulling wits of the eighteenth century of his own country. What he did dislike was the young *ingénue* so carefully trained in ignorance and pitched at him by her mother. American girls were too raspy to please his taste, they never could get away from their moneybags ; yet they came nearest to the standard for wit, dash, aplomb.

Ranging over the whole feminine field in the lordly way of every eligible young man, he saw no Duchess of Reith, and was content. He could get along very well yet awhile.

But the fates do not always have it their own way. Sometimes a sportive spirit snatches the yarn and bolts, and that is how romances are made.

The sportive spirit snatched at the yarn the day "Hubert Peyton" joined the *Soleil* at Naples, and as the fates were not nimble enough to snatch it back, they were compelled to manipulate another piece.

The more Hubert Peyton came into association with Nora Diss the greater the satisfaction he felt in his own brain, for she stimulated his ideas, so that primarily it was a love affair of the intellect rather than the emotions.

Nora did not conceal her vivid interest in him as a class apart from her own. Her fusillade of questions put him on very good terms with himself, because she accepted his views in all sincerity. That dukes could hold divergent views never entered her mind. She admired his clear-headed grasp of the times, the live-and-let-live principle which is the creed of the true Australian more than any other nation, though like all creeds it falls sometimes into abeyance.

"I like a talk with you," he told her frankly.

"And I with you. I never dreamt to be so chummy with a duke."

The chumminess thrived. People began to notice it. Lady Rose set aside her pique and worked warily. The dangling £5,000 was very near.

Perhaps the Duke of Reith never would have proposed were it not for his family connections, male and female, of all ages and degrees, who took to "feeling it their duty" to put a spoke in, the usual spoke, sometimes called *noblesse oblige*, sometimes plain snobbishness, according to the state in life.

"My dear young kinsman," wrote a titled clergyman, "pause awhile before you rush on a step that can only lead to disaster, for a *mésalliance* always ends," etc.

"Dear Reith," questioned his uncle, "what is this story about your engagement to an Australian girl whose father was a miner?—a degree worse than a pig-sticker in Chicago. I need not advise you against

such an alliance, for I trust to your upholding of the family honour. We would be a laughing stock for ever," etc.

"Dear Hubert," from a younger brother. "There's a yarn going round about you and some girl—Australian—who's got you on toast. Or is it that old devil, Rose Allway's doing? I have had a row with Hether-ton over it and offered to cross the Channel to settle it there. Duelling's dead in this spoon-fed old country, but not honour," and more to the same effect.

The duke folded the letters carefully and sat awhile in a fit of abstraction, then took his hat, an immaculate hat, yet he smoothed it with his elbow like an ordinary young man, and kept on smoothing it, never seeing the hat at all, or knowing what he was doing, for his mind was adjusting itself to other issues.

"Damn their cheek!" he muttered. "A man might be happy in this world if he had no relations." For a moment his thoughts vaguely strayed to wondering what sort of a fight they might put up in the next.

In this mood he called on Nora Diss, asking to see her alone. He hoped that Lady Rose would keep out of the way, a hope that was realized.

He did not look like a lover; he did not look like a duke. A solicitor going to brief a barrister might have had the same appearance, slightly flustered, quite decided, and with an elevating idea that he and not the barrister was the supreme party.

Nora wondered what this special call meant, and looked critically at herself in the mirror. It would be nonsense to say she had never given a thought to capturing a young man of rank. Certain spiteful letters from anonymous correspondents were already amongst her effects. She knew he liked her; she had seen his eyes kindle at her approach; his handclasp lingered; but sound sense told her these things were no guide to marriage.

Yet so closely does the fairy world of fancy touch this

workaday one, as they spin along through space together, that we can take a flight in our daydreams and be among roseate mists ever revealing new wonders as they melt and disperse.

So Nora Diss had dreamed of what might happen—supposing—only supposing. Now here was the fairy world pushing the workaday one off its orbit.

Her wondering ceased as he took her hand, for he held it a long time and watched her face. She returned his gaze frankly. Then he put his left hand on his right, hesitated just another moment, and spoke :

“ You know why I have come—Nora ? ”

“ Yes,” she said, without any beating about the bush, going very pale instead of blushing, and having no sense of being either glad or sorry.

The little straightforward answer pleased him.

“ You care for me ? ” he asked. Afterwards he wondered at his paucity of words in one of the momentous passages of his life.

“ Yes,” she said again. The spirit of honesty impelled her to add, “ But I am not in love with you.”

“ Are you in love with anybody else ? ”

“ No.”

“ Love is no great matter. People grow into love. You are the wife I want, a true companion—chums, as you put it the other day.”

“ But what will your people say ? ”

“ I am the head of my house,” he answered proudly. That marked the line between them more than anything else.

“ I have no house,” she said. “ You understand that ? Wait, wait. I shouldn’t like you to think me oppressed with a sense of humility because of that, for I am not. I hold myself as good as anybody going, house or no house, title or no title.”

“ Why, of course, we all started equal——”

“ Wait. I want you to see from all the points of view, before you—you——”

" I know all the points of view. The only one that concerns me—shall we be happy together?—that I'm sure of."

" Yes ; but are you strong enough to be above the sneers of your people?"

" Good heavens ! If an English duke can't arrange his affairs to please himself—who can ? Come, Nora, don't start conundrums."

He caught her to him and kissed her rapturously enough ; but she could not help thinking how utterly romance was lacking, or if this were romance how utterly commonplace it was.

So Nora Diss became the *fiancée* of an English duke with a scroll of sub-titles and honours that would fill a page, and the fact was blazoned forth in the customary fashion. The interfering relatives were answered as interfering relatives are always answered. Lady Rose cabled the news to Joseph Ireton, and wrote as well, concluding with the significant words, " You see I have kept my promise." Naturally she expected the other part of the promise, the paper part, by the next puff of wind.

But many things were to happen before then.

Nora accidentally met Dick Heene in the Park and felt inclined to run away ; but he had seen her and raised his hat. She could not read his thoughts from his face, yet her intuition divined that he was making too much of the pretence to race Snuff after sticks.

Her gaiety of spirit suddenly deserted her. In a very subdued mood she responded to his greeting. He did not allude to the engagement, and this added to her embarrassment. They exchanged stilted common-places, discussed Snuff, became animated over Australian cricketing news, only to fall into blank silence.

" Dick," she said softly, " you've heard surely ? Won't you wish me luck ? " His face darkened.

" No ! "

Her self-possession returned, and took umbrage at the implied slight.

"I'm sorry I asked. Good afternoon."

"Wait a little, Nora. I'm not wishing you luck, because there's no luck in such a matter. How can you understand high life? To be as one of his people?"

"Americans girls do. Why not Australians?"

"Because Australians are English at heart. Deep down class feeling is there. Americans are two centuries older than we are—long enough to have forgotten."

"Oh, stop this preaching! You're like a Socialist. It is only jealousy!" she flashed out angrily. It is the grossest of sex insults to tell a woman she cannot rise and fill any position, no matter how high, for every woman is a potential queen—to herself.

Dick pulled himself up sternly.

"I am not jealous. It is beneath the blood of my race to be jealous."

"*Your* race indeed—who are your race?"

"English yeomen!" He turned sharply and left her.

Nora marched in an opposite direction, her cheeks aflame, her tongue ready to do battle with the first comer. For lack of a target she worked off the war material by a brisk turn round the Serpentine.

The lake was shrouded in the pearly fog of early spring, a grey mistiness made up of many twilights and dead sunbeams that had lost their way out of the world. The trees on the opposite shore loomed in strange shapes and a great crimson sun floated in the west. Sometimes the fog grew silvery white and receded, revealing, it might be, the impalpable entrance to that fairy land we all strive to reach.

"Yeomen! Yeomen! That's a cut at me. I'll pay him out. Father's people were of the manufacturing class, as if it mattered."

She knew it mattered very much to her. She envied

Dick Heene that old family record in Southshire. Though the land now belonged to a dozen other people, there was pride of birth and pride of former possessions.

And Nora Diss hadn't a soul belonging to her save the brush and broom manufacturer in Whitechapel.

A light wind blew the Serpentine into ripples and recalled those days on board ship when she heard people talking of Kent or Devon or the North Country. She had looked out over the waste of waters longing for some touch of kindred. Her heart even warmed to the Whitechapel relations, impossible though Lady Rose had dubbed them, more impossible now since she was to be the bride of a duke. She must hush up Whitechapel. Besides, they did not want her.

She would be the first Australian girl to marry a duke. There was a patriotic lustre about the achievement that stirred her feminine vanity for a little. But at night, when she strove to obtain mental sustenance from her state, and tried to imagine the ducal diamonds, she wept miserably because she had refused Dick Heene, a toiler in the city.

Nora lost some of her sunny laughter after this meeting. Her new friends noticed it, and said she was endeavouring to divest herself of Australian gaucheries, and rise to the dignity of a duchess. Those who really cared for her ascribed it to another reason.

"She is feeling the tremendous responsibility of what the position will bring. I shouldn't be a bit surprised if she backed out."

But no girl was ever known to back out of an engagement with a duke.

CHAPTER FORTY-THREE

Truth sometimes shakes hands with fiction out of mere friendly feeling.

MR. JOSHUA NIX, expert in nomenclature, spent very little time in his office in Bond Street. Necessarily the peculiar requirements of his business took him continually away on "research" work, and his interviews were at the private abodes of his clients; but Bond Street served for an address.

It was a dark cupboard of a room squeezed out of the landing, but the astute Josh made it look bright by silvery blue paper and electric light, furnished it with a quartet of small oak chairs and a writing-table, and filled in a crevice with books of reference.

Though it might seem an easy matter to flourish on terminal consonants and double "ee's," he really earned his money, for he brought brains and hard work to bear on his researching, bogus though it was. The faking could only be done by a genius. Considerable knowledge of heraldry, ancestry, and kindred subjects was a necessity, besides a working comprehension of many languages, and an eye like a hawk for usable material.

The pedigree for Nora Diss was complete and only lacked Lady Rose's approval. Nora herself scarcely counted, seeing that a pedigree was almost as necessary as a petticoat.

He was always observant of ceremony in dealing with his clients, and apprised Lady Rose that he waited her

choice of time. She was anxious to see him, and made an early appointment. When the expert in nomenclature appeared she ran her stony blue gaze over him in approval. He certainly dressed for the part, and might have passed for a prime minister.

"I hope my efforts will please you, my lady." Josh never failed in suavity or respect.

"Let me judge. Probably you have heard of my *protégée's* engagement, so that this must be used at once if satisfactory."

Josh took a small packet from a leather book-case and commenced to read:

"Diss, that is, D'Iss, corruption of d'Issy, the name of a soldier who took his name from a department in France, Issy, in the beginning of the eleventh century, and fought in the wars of the Capets. His prowess attracted the attention of chroniclers and he joined the army of William the Conqueror——"

Lady Rose groaned, and Josh looked up startled.

"Something wrong, my lady?"

"Everything's wrong. What on earth do you want to drag in William the Conqueror for? I'm sick of that hoary old humbug. His coming has created more rascality in England than all the invading marauders put together. Everyone who wants to fake up a pedigree settles on William the Conqueror; they haven't an idea beyond William the Conqueror. For goodness sake, give him a rest. Do you imagine I'm going to pay twenty pounds for *that*?"

"Well, well, we'll cross William the Conqueror out," said the imperturbable Josh.

"Cross him out for ever in any dealings you have with me. Then this D'Issy matter. You're all wrong about the departments of France. They were not named in those days. It is only in modern times that the system of defining departments has arisen."

"No, pardon me, my lady, the system obtained so far back as Henry of Navarre's time, but I grant you

there has been renaming. I have been careful to verify that. There is still a Château D'Issy, and record of its owners for centuries."

Lady Rose looked at him sharply.

"Are you sure?"

"Positive. That's what prompted me."

"Make it D'Iss."

"Very good, my lady; but what about the ennoblement? I have written by the Conq—is that to go out?"

"Yes. No need of ennoblement. Make him more of a soldier than a courtier, so that he couldn't push his way in scheming courts."

Josh beamed and interlined this in his neat hand.

"Ah, my lady, you see what birth really is. You have my heartiest admiration."

The compliment pleased her, though it was brains more than birth that helped her.

"We next have trace of a D'Iss in border warfare."

"How did he get *there*?"

"Adventurous spirit, my lady, lack of recognition by the Conq—I mean the King. A century later the name is spelt Diss, and as such appears in several old records—to wit: A gift of arable land——"

"I take it for granted," she interrupted. "Get on to something more tangible. No need to go back so far; however, since you have done it—and can supply data, I hope?"

"Oh, yes, everything verified, my lady."

"Then let it stand. You needn't read it; I don't want to hear a lot of details, but I *do* want a *clou* of some kind, and that is what you lack."

Josh turned over two or three pages of closely written matter and recommenced:

"The name James Diss is mentioned in an old Manchester chronicle of Cromwell's time——"

"Eh? What? What? That's more like it. She comes of Manchester people. But be careful."

"I've been most careful, my lady. You told me

of her Manchester origin, and I spent a week in that city."

He knew she did not believe him, but statements of this kind were part of his stock-in-trade.

"This James Diss headed the townsfolk in defence against the arrogance of the soldiery. An insult had been offered to some peaceable citizens; the more martial spirits resented it and dislodged a guard."

"Is that true or fake?" she asked bluntly.

"Perfectly true, my lady. Listen: 'James Diss at the head of two score men, all unarmed, and even untrained in the use of weapons, sought out the captain in authority and demanded redress. It was refused and the citizens sneered at. Diss then gave the order and his men fell on the guard, pommelling them right and left, notwithstanding the enemy's fire, which, however, was at too close quarters to do much harm. "One kind of arm's as good as another; here goes for freedom," they shouted. Diss and his followers then withdrew and reported the incident to Cromwell himself; but nothing more was heard of the affair, and shortly afterwards the obnoxious guard was removed.' Such is the incident curtailed."

"That one point is worth the whole screed," said Lady Rose. "We do not need another item. What more is wanted these socialistic times? It's the sanest bit of work you have done, Mr. Nix."

Mr. Nix beamed and bowed.

"And now the crest, my lady. Here are two or three ideas for you to choose from——"

"She can afford to do without a crest with this Manchester fire-eater to hold a record."

Lady Rose signed a cheque for twenty pounds and the commission was complete. Save in one point. Nora Diss received the account of her pedigree without enthusiasm.

"You do not seem to apprehend the importance of it," said Lady Rose, wondering at her apathy.

"I've come to the conclusion that nothing is important in the whole world. We come and go ; laugh and weep for a little, or perhaps keep quiet if we are jelly-fish ; eat a few crusts of more or less fancy bread ; then we're shot into a hole in the ground and forgotten."

"My dear child, this kind of philosophy has all been better said before you were born. Don't you go dabbling in it. And I think you show questionable taste in being so unresponsive. I've secured you a footing before even the season commenced. Through my agency you are entering on an alliance of unequalled brilliancy and importance, and——"

Nora Diss flamed into anger, and gave no control to tongue or thought.

"And now you are upbraiding me for my attitude in seeing through the sham of the whole thing ! Lady Rose, as I told you before, and have made it abundantly clear always, I am very grateful for the kindness and interest shown me ; but you'll grant that I have also tried to help myself. The truth is I wanted to lessen the expense to dad as much as possible, and when a chance came for me to show off—that is plain English—I took it. Dad and the mater had set their hearts on me doing a splash, and were ready to pay any price. That price was—you ! "

"Nora ! "

"Pardon me, Lady Rose, we had better clear the air of thunderclouds while we are at it. What you undertook to do for dad's cheque has never been mentioned to me by *them* ; but here in England I have been enlightened about your methods. So, please, don't talk of securing me a footing, and an alliance and that rubbish, for it's all in the bill."

"Nora, if you wish to achieve any prestige, you must divest yourself of this vulgarity."

"Then why didn't you point out the vulgarity before you secured the footing for me, or the alliance ? It's the first time you've mentioned it."

Lady Rose's stony blue gaze was shot with streaks of red fire. It was in her to box the girl's ears. Once upon a time it was the custom of high-born ladies to cuff their dependents and belabour them with sticks. This modern wirepuller sighed for a return of those days. However, she could give back acid for acid.

"You talk as if Mr. Ireton's cheque were the *quid pro quo* to cover everything; but you are mistaken. Mr. Ireton *did* place a sum of money at my disposal for the achievement of his wishes; but he hasn't carried out the rest of his promise. The cheque he gave was to defray expenses incurred on your behalf; the cheque he *promised* to send as some expression of thanks for my—er—efforts has not arrived."

Nora threw up her head; the elder woman did not like the expression of her eyes.

"Do you mean dad has failed in his promise to you?"

"Such seems the explanation."

"I do not believe it. If dad promised you or anybody else anything they would have it, even if he went without himself."

"Then why has he not written?"

"There's scarcely time."

"I cabled as well as wrote. He could cable too. It is easy to borrow a code."

"What! Cable the promised cheque! Oh, Lady Rose! You are more contemptible than I thought. I'll not stay in your house another minute!"

The lady of title also flared into fury.

"Beware what you do in leaving my protection! Your prospective marriage would not be worth that!"

"Then I'll consider the marriage 'off' since it depends on your nod. I'll explain to the Duke of Reith how I'm placed, and ask him to set me free of the compact."

"You are scarcely as crackbrained as that, seeing the way you manœuvred for him from the first."

"Then if *I* manœuvred, the success followed my

efforts, not yours ; yet you said just now that you secured me a footing *and* an alliance. Lady Allway, you are inconsistent. Perhaps dad thinks so too, and hesitates about that cheque—by cable. Of course it may come by post after all. But not if I can stop it, for he'll hear the truth from me. So shall the Duke of Reith. So shall everyone whose business it is to know. As for this precious, penny-a-lining pedigree, *that* for it ! Perhaps you can paste it together for your next *protégée* ! ”

The *chef d'œuvre* of Joshua Nix fluttered on the air in a small cloud of shreds, and Nora marched out of the room looking more victorious than she felt.

Could she have seen Lady Rose's spasm of real fright her heart would have made merry, for the guide, philosopher and friend uttered her thoughts aloud :

“ What's happened to the fool ? She'll ruin everything in this mood ! ”

CHAPTER FORTY-FOUR

Ill news is quicker than Puck's girdle.

ALONE in her room, Nora started to pack at a wild rate, only to find that she possessed ten times as much stuff as her boxes could hold. In the way of wealthy young women she had indulged in the indiscriminate buying of what the advertisements call "new season's goods," three-fourths rubbish for the most part, and the remainder out of mode after being once in use.

But Nora was not going back on herself.

"I'll burn the rotten stuff sooner than let it hinder me."

Burning was easier said than done. She tossed the fripperies about vindictively, as if they were a fetish of fate, and the height of her rage evaporated.

"I'm going on like an imbecile. Now if I were a man I would have a smoke and think it out. That's simple, at any rate." She lit a cigarette, threw herself into an easy chair, and puffed vigorously. "I'll not stay here, that's certain. Where am I going?" She recalled numerous matrons and mothers who had said, "If ever you want advice, my dear, or a friendly talk, come to me." But not one of them filled the bill. "Perhaps I ought to write to Hubert at once and——"

The half thought did not complete itself, because another thought set up a fight for first place. Naturally high-spirited and independent, anything in the nature of a set-back galled her; but she was gifted with a rare power of bringing herself to book.

"Oh, why have other girls relatives and I none! If Uncle Maurice would take a flat and let me run it—I could pay the ex's—and see London the way I want to see it; we would get all the invitations we wanted. Uncle Maurice is known as a sculptor, and art is as good as aristocracy."

The scheme pleased her. The only difficulty was that the whereabouts of Maurice Darley could not be located unless she applied to Dick Heene.

This brought back the question of packing. Considerably calmer in mind, she again turned to the frocks and frills.

"A society girl's stock in trade."

Her good humour rallied, and she smiled to herself. The maid she and Lady Rose shared was perfectly aware of the passage-at-arms, and seized a pretence of appearing with a cardboard box—yet another costume.

"I want you help me pack," said Nora. "But first tell me how many trunks I must get, and put the most necessary things in this."

"Oh, take me too, Miss Diss; I don't want to stay here. I hate it; and I could be a real help to you."

"We'll see; we'll see. Only help me now."

Then Nora humbled her pride and her anger against Dick Heene and telephoned to ask Maurice Darley's address.

It was not Dick Heene's voice that answered, but one much sharper and more decided:

"In Paris somewhere, got a commission for a statue. No, I'm not Dick; I'm Dick's dad, Raban Heene, just arrived. Dick's gone abroad for a few days on business. Who's speaking? Diss? Not Nora? Why, child, how on earth could you hear so soon?"

"Hear what?" cried Nora into the receiver.

"About Ireton."

"Dad—what about him? Anything wrong?"

Raban Heene fumbled and muttered. Clearly she knew nothing of the ill news that had reached him, and

he hesitated to spoil her holiday, as he phrased it. But she repeated her query so insistently that he was compelled to reply.

"I'm sorry to be the bearer of such bad news ; but when you rang up for Darley I made sure it was in connection with it."

"Oh, Mr. Heene, do tell me the worst at once ; don't keep me on tenterhooks."

"All right, child, perhaps it is better you should know. Poor Jo Ireton's failed ; the news has just been cabled."

"Failed ? You mean insolvent ? "

"Yes, worse luck, but he'll be able to pay twenty shillings in the pound out of the sale of property. Too much darned hospitality and not enough overseeing."

"Mr. Heene," said Nora piteously, "I would like to see you at once. I'm very worried, and this news staggers me. Where can I see you ? "

"Tell me where you are, child, and I'll be there at half-past six. I can't leave here yet."

She gave the address and returned to her room, tossing aside the fripperies with a gasp.

"Poor dear old dad ! And I have helped to ruin him with *this*—and *her* ! "

CHAPTER FORTY-FIVE

Frankness is the soul of speech.

THE unexpected trouble acted like a tonic. It braced her up for the unpleasantness in store, and lent a keenness of vision unusual with young people.

"That puts the stopper on the season," she mused. "There'll be no presentation at Court, and the engagement will be 'off,' and I had better be 'off' too—home."

A sigh escaped her for the fleshpots of Egypt ; but she resolutely faced the future.

"What on earth am I to do with all these rags? I can't wear them, that's clear, with poor dad insolvent. Dear old dad ! But how on earth did he keep going if he were on the verge of a crash? I wonder whether Hubert will take it badly, or whether he'll be glad of the escape? "

She sat awhile ruminating on this point, then took off her engagement ring, made up a package of gifts, all the time concocting the letter that must accompany them. Sentences formed with lightning rapidity, only to fall to pieces a moment later. Eventually this emerged :

Dear Hubert,—Most unwelcome and embarrassing news of my people is the reason of this letter. My stepfather has failed and I am afraid we are penniless. I would not dream of remaining here in London while there is so much trouble at home, and intend to leave as soon as possible. You will understand how this

affects our engagement. It must end ; that is the only sane conclusion, and I am returning your gifts with this. I hope you will not experience any annoyance by statements that may reach you, but you will admit I am acting honestly and in good faith.

You have my sincere wishes for your welfare.

NORA.

She read it over with a grim look on her face.

"It's as sentimental as a bandicoot," she said, "and all the better. I couldn't put sentiment on paper now if I were to be shot."

She sent the letter and packet to the Duke of Reith by the maid.

When Raban Heene arrived it was no girl in tears and trouble who greeted him, but the same self-possessed Nora with more colour than usual because of her inward excitement. The little grey wisp of humanity nodded approvingly.

"Now, my lass," he began, before they were done shaking hands, always rather a lengthy function amongst Australians meeting overseas, "you're not to take on and feel badly."

"I'm *not* !"

"That's right, because Jo Ireton's only under a cloud for a bit ; everybody will be paid in full. So if you have made any debts let me know and I'll be your banker."

"You're very good, Mr. Heene, but I've only spent my allowance—spent it foolishly, in the light of this. I've made no debts—oh, Heavens, I had forgotten *that* !"

"What ?"

She hesitated and avoided his eyes.

"Tell me, lass ; I'll see you through."

"No, no. I can countermand it at once."

"But what is it ?"

It was an order for part of her trousseau, the advice of Lady Rose. Nora could scarcely explain this to Dick Heene's father.

"Only some costumes," she replied evasively.

Raban Heene thought the Iretons were to blame for the luxurious way they had brought the girl up. In his idea of life every human being should know how to earn a living, and should be made to understand that selfish and senseless expenditure is a cardinal sin. But he liked Nora, and wanted to lend a hand in steering Dick's love affair to a happy conclusion, so he made no comment.

"Neither the mater nor dad have mentioned a word about financial troubles in their letters; yet this must have been coming on for some time."

"Not quite. They have been living up to the hilt for years; but Jo Ireton could have got along all right if he had not plunged over a wild cat opal field recently discovered up north. I knew of it, but refused to take any. He was got at with one or two more; none of them had any knowledge of what was going on inside, so they'll come to grief. In Ireton's case he has plenty at the back of him to pay up; but the others haven't."

"Will dad have to sell The Launching Place? It will break his heart."

"He must sell it if he's to keep his record for honourable dealing. In all probability the station will be bought by a firm or a bank, and he will be made manager and allowed to keep his home. He will, of course, have to draw in and live plainly."

"He would have been wiser never to have gone in for so much hospitality. He used to say that it drew people from all over the world."

"It did that. All the lazy loafers and free feeders descended on him from Dan—to Omdurman."

"Mr. Heene, you said just now you would help me."

"I meant it, lassie; go ahead."

"It's this. Lady Rose Allway——"

"Ah, I guess what's coming. She's fleeced old Jo for a trifle. I happen to be interested in the bank through which the cheque passed——"

" But she expects more."

" Oh, does she? A bit of an appetite for money."

" Listen. It makes me ashamed to discuss the wretched affair. To-day we had some words, and I—well—I said a few things. She hit back, making out that dad had not kept his promise—that some cheque he had given was only to pay expenses——"

" Pay expenses! Whew! It was for £2,500!"

" I don't know. She says he promised her something else to recompense her for what she has done for me."

" What's she done for you? "

" She's chaperoned me, taken me under her wing, introduced me to people and so forth."

" H'm. That doesn't sound very ruinous. She could do it twice over on what she's had already. However, we'll see."

" She expected dad to cable her the money. That's what made me fly out. Before I telephoned to you I was packing up to leave here, and wanted to find Uncle Maurice to go to him."

" We'll find him, lassie; go on packing up. You can't stop here. I'll hand you over to my landlady; she's a real good sort. But what about these dandy folk you're in with? And the invitations? "

" I've made up my mind to take the first boat home, to be with dad and mum."

" Right. . . . And this other fixture? "

" You mean my engagement? "

" Yes. Is it valid? What will the young duke say? "

Nora threw up her head. The old man watched in admiration.

" I'm not going to ask his opinion. I have written to explain what has happened, and to say there can be no thought of engagement now."

" H'm. Of course, I don't know how a duke may take it, for I know nothing of dukes. The only one I ever spoke to was down on his luck; but an ordinary

man would say, 'insolvency be damned ! Once an engagement always an engagement !'

Nora turned her eyes away. In her inmost heart she was not really eager for this attitude on the part of her *fiancé*. Old Raban Heene watched her closely.

"Are you keen on him, lassie?"

"I like him very much. We are very good friends."

"That all? Take my advice, little Nora: don't you go giving yourself away unless your heart's in the job. Young folk should mate for love, like the birds do, and leave the middle-aged to marry for money. Crowns and coronets don't fetch as much as they used. Where's this Lady Thingummy? Because I'd like a word with her now I'm here; save me another journey. Could you let her know? Send one of these flunkys. Poor old Jo seems to be paying for a crowd of them."

It was unnecessary. Lady Rose herself entered the room under the impression that visitors awaited her, and that Nora was entertaining them. After the quarrel she wished to meet on neutral ground, and perhaps patch up a peace after the visitors left.

Instead, she saw a small, clever-faced old man evidently on intimate terms.

"Lady Rose," began the girl in a clear voice, "allow me to introduce Mr. Raban Heene, one of my oldest friends."

The stony blue gaze travelled swiftly over him as he stood formally bowing and treating Lady Rose to as keen a scrutiny as she ever received in her life. She made no miscalculations about her social status, and scented an enemy.

"I am glad to see any friend of Nora's, but I am afraid it is too late for me to stay now, as I have an engagement."

"Mr. Heene will not detain you, Lady Rose, more than a few minutes. He wishes to speak to you on an important matter connected with our conversation this afternoon."

"I really cannot stay."

Nora continued in the same calm clear tone.

"You will remember that I said I did not wish to remain any longer under your roof. Well, Mr. Heene, as the oldest friend I have in London, is befriending me. Circumstances have arisen which render it unnecessary to put you to any further inconvenience."

The stony gaze changed to one of spiteful surprise, but not for long.

"I must remind you, Nora, that your strange Australian methods have no observance in this country. Your parents placed you in my care, and I can only recognize them."

"It may interest you to know that I am returning to them by the next boat."

Raban Heene, looking as impenetrable as one of his own gum trees, spoke for the first time.

"I really think it is the right thing to do, ma'am."

He did not say "my lady" or "madam," and his keen watch of her suggested many things.

"I do not see what you have to do with the matter, Mr.—er—Heene."

"You will presently, ma'am, after a few minutes' talk."

"I have told you I cannot stay."

Lady Rose turned to the door. Heene moved after her and put his hand on the panel.

"I cannot come again; my time's valuable also. You must listen. Nora here tells me you consider Jo Ireton hasn't kept his promise to you for helping his girl to get kow-towing with Park Lane, and you feel a bit put out about it because the money—that is, the promise—hasn't come by cable. So if you'll allow me, I'll settle it for him. We are old friends, Jo and I, and I should be sorry to have his girl bothered."

"Take your hand from that door if you wish to avoid exposure, or I shall ring for my servants."

"Oh, I don't mind exposure in the least. Do you?"

Lady Rose moved quickly to the electric bell and rang. A footman came to the door and partly opened it, but the restraining hand made its influence felt.

"Go away, young man, you are not intended to hear this conversation." The door was pressed forward again, and Raban Heene continued: "You got £2,500 out of Jo Ireton, and that ought to be enough for what you've done, although I know you landed Alf Keele for a cool ten thou. Here, clear out, you dunder-head! Didn't I say this wasn't intended for you!"

The last was aimed at the footman, who again tried the door. Raban Heene flung out, and the man sprang away in fear. Lady Rose made a quick movement, but Heene faced her.

"You had better hear me out, ma'am. This is all I want to know—how much do you expect Jo Ireton to make good?"

"I refuse to hold any further speech with you."

"Very good. Come, Nora."

Lady Rose found her tongue.

"I esteemed Mr. Ireton as an Englishman, with some claims to birth and breeding; but when he dares to send me a vulgar, little——"

"I'm little, certainly, but not vulgar—just plain of speech, like yourself at times."

"I wish I had never interested myself in such people."

"Yes. That's the worst of accepting hospitality. You never know who's who."

"There's no need to prolong this scene," interposed Nora. "Lady Rose, I'll say good-bye to you now, as you will not care for another meeting—nor I—and I have much to see to."

The patrician flung aside the etiquette of her class and crimsoned with rage. Her rough skin always looked its worst on these occasions. Raban Heene, studying her judicially, concluded there was a touch of Billingsgate in her noble blood. Her language bore this out.

"Be sure I'll ruin you for this insult! If you fancy that the footing you have secured through *me* is proof against this ingratitude, you are mistaken; and if you imagine that the rank you hope to achieve——"

"I hope nothing of the kind. I have broken off my engagement with the Duke of Reith."

"What!" shrieked the wirepuller. "You mountain of folly and stupidity! Do you know that your father made it part of my—my—protection to you that you should marry a title!"

"Hullo!" ejaculated old Raban. "No wonder Jo went broke since he was off his dot in that fashion."

"My father stipulated *that*!" repeated Nora.

"Yes." Lady Rose was triumphant now at sight of the girl's embarrassment.

"Then all the more reason the marriage will not take place."

"I've been put to enormous expense on your behalf," snarled Lady Rose. "His paltry cheque will not cover the half of it. It will cost me £5,000 to extricate myself from the plans and agreements I have entered into——"

"Oh, tush!" said Raban Heene quite pleasantly. "I know what £5,000 is. I've had the spending of it before to-day; but since you seem to expect more, in addition to what you've had, I'll give you £500 as a solatium, and I'll write the cheque at once."

"How dare you insult me!"

"Oh, come, my lady; you pocketed £200 over the sale of a motor to Jim Stewart, and a percentage on a little side-car to his brother. All's fish that comes to your fancy. What you've spent on Nora Diss can be easily totted up into two figures, and you've got a commission or a percentage on everything that's been sold *her*, because I made it my business to know. Damn it all, ma'am! Be reasonable. We Australians are not a perambulating gold mine. £500 or nothing. Think it over. Put down all the items in black and white,

that's the safest way, then you won't forget anything ; but I must have the items. Let me know whenever you like—there's my private address. Good afternoon, ma'am. How many more lame dogs of the British aristocracy am I to help ? ” he added to himself. “ Come, Nora ! ”

CHAPTER FORTY-SIX

When love-making becomes a Q.E.D. no hearts are broken.

ALTHOUGH Nora announced her intention of returning to Melbourne by the next boat, there was one matter to adjust which surmounted everything else. The Duke of Reith meant to stand by his engagement in the way of an Englishman.

He called next morning on Lady Rose to get at the truth, and heard so much that was not within shadow of the truth that he guessed there had been a quarrel.

"I never was so mistaken in anyone in my life," said the aggrieved lady, "and it's a lesson to me to be careful whom I take up. These wretched Australians have no sense of honour or decent feeling, or——"

"But where is Nora?" he asked abruptly, wearied with her tirade.

"She went off last night with a dreadful individual, she called him her oldest friend, after allowing him to insult me grossly."

"On what point was the insult?"

"I can scarcely explain that to you, can I?"

"Decidedly you can, since it concerns Nora. Nora is my affianced wife."

"You don't mean to—to——"

"Keep my engagement? That's just what I do mean. A man doesn't throw over a girl because her father's gone insolvent."

"Gone insolvent!"

"Didn't you know?"

"Then that's what they meant! Vulgar confederates! And I face ruin with the expense I've incurred over that creature!"

"Expense over what creature?"

"Oh, you drive me crazy. Can't you see for yourself?"

He did see for himself and grew angry, for club gossip had enlightened him.

"I don't know what arrangement you and Miss Diss or her people entered into; but if you have lost through her, or incurred expenses through her, let me know the amount and I'll settle it."

"By the time I have carried out my agreements, taking houses and what not, it will cost me £5,000."

He did not blench, but looked her straight in the eye.

"Very well. I'll pay it, only all accounts go through my agent's hands, and it is his rule—by my wish—to have each item specified."

This was Raban Heene's Australian way over again with a vengeance.

"As if I would take *your* money," she snapped.

He yearned to retort that she would take anybody's money, and was a disgrace to her class.

"Did Nora leave no address?" he asked.

"I really couldn't tell you. The dreadful individual with her——"

"What was his name?"

"How on earth should I know his name? When I returned yesterday the two of them were here, and she sprang him on me."

"Without a name?"

"Probably she mentioned a name; I was too amazed to notice."

"Will you inquire of your household if any address has been left for the forwarding of letters?"

Finding herself cornered Lady Rose touched a bell and turned her stony gaze on the young footman.

"Did Miss Diss leave any instructions about letters?"

"Yes, my lady—27, Portchester Gardens, care of Mr. Raban Heene."

"Raban Heene!" exclaimed the duke. "That's the man who's running the——" He pulled himself up as he encountered her sharp glance. The footman retired.

"If you'll allow me to offer advice," she said; but he rose.

"It's good of you, but I am one of the kind who never take advice unless I—ask for it."

He said good-bye, and as he left the room he caught sight of her face in a mirror. It was like a stone fury struck by lightning.

The duke walked across the Park, a definite decision in his mind, though underneath lay a welter of moods and emotions.

He felt annoyed with Nora for behaving in this hysterical fashion. From his prejudgment of her character he thought she would have shown more dignity in an awkward situation. Instead she ran about from pillar to post like a schoolgirl.

Gossip and scandal and slander never failed to put him in a bad temper; he hated the meannesses of life. Human nature might be treacherous; it might even be immoral; but it should never be sordid, save amongst the lowest classes, who were driven to it by penury. It was the one streak of idealism in him. All the rest was commonplace elevated by class breeding.

This was sordid from first to last. Lady Rose and her vulgar clapperclawings; Nora and her wild flight; the Australian father and his blatant extravagance; somewhere in his slow-moving brain arose a vague regret that he did not go to Canada.

But when he arrived at Portchester Gardens and beheld a hall stacked with boxes, his heart stirred unpleasantly, as if in tumult for what it was loath to lose.

He expected to find Nora worried and worn, but she was not. She looked strangely older, yet of indefinably greater charm. Her age might have doubled in a single night were it not that youth had twined caressing hands about age and lent a lustre to the years.

She held out her hand, and he took it without offering a kiss. He was too puzzled to think of kisses.

"You are acting in an extraordinary fashion, Nora. I dislike it."

"You must forgive me. A whole set of circumstances have brought this about. It's humbling for me to discuss them, but I think you should know."

"Why couldn't I have known before?" he asked testily. "If your stepfather was bothered about his affairs, surely there was some other way out than splashing into bankruptcy? Surely he could have got help? I understood he was very sound."

"So he was—is still, as far as I can make out. The insolvency is in the interests of the creditors, not his own; dad's not the sort to do hurt to any living thing. As for letting you know of his financial affairs I was quite in the dark myself. It was like a thunderclap to me. Of course I could not remain in London, flaunting about in fine clothes and all that, with an insolvency at the back of it, could I?"

"N-no. You could have cancelled your engagements and lived quietly with——"

"*Not* with Lady Rose!" she flashed out.

"No. My sister would have taken you."

"Doesn't it occur to you that duty, leave alone affection, should take me back to my own people now that they are in trouble?"

"There's something in that. Even then, if, as you say, the creditors are to be paid in full, I can't for the life of me see the need of all this fuss."

"Dad can't meet his liabilities until he puts everything into the hands of his creditors, which he has done.

Everything has gone ; our beautiful home—it was a garden in the heart of the mountains——”

She caught her breath and turned away. He came to her at once and took her in his arms.

“ Well, well, you can make the home I give you equally beautiful. Surely you didn’t imagine that I was going to break an engagement in that helter-skelter fashion ? ”

But she gently drew away from his encircling arms and spoke the thought that had been gradually coming into shape since the night she wept over Dick Heene.

“ Hubert, dear, listen. You and I were meant to be friends, real friends, not man and wife, for you are not really in love with me, nor I with you ; I said so at first.”

“ But we settled all this.”

“ Not in the light of what has come up now. There’s another matter, too, that I have kept a secret, because—because—I am sometimes a snob, not always. God knows I try to get away from it, and in this instance just because I tried hard I was punished.”

“ Do speak plain English,” he said rather peevishly, wondering what dreadful disclosure was in store for him.

“ Well, I knew that my father—not Mr. Ireton, but Tom Diss as everybody called him—was a Manchester man with a family in trade, and that part of his family were in—Whitechapel.”

She studied his face, but not a muscle moved. He merely gazed at her in return.

“ These Whitechapel Disses—for a long time I ignored them. I wanted to bury Whitechapel, for I had heard it was dreadful ; but one day I woke up from my snobbery. I think I wanted my own flesh and blood, some tie with father’s people, and hunted them out.”

He smiled slightly.

“ And you found them unspeakable, I suppose ? ”

“ No. I found them—just all-sufficient for them-

selves ; kind to their workpeople ; but they had no place for a stranger—and Tom Diss's daughter was just a stranger to them, nothing more. So I came away, and never spoke of the incident to anyone till now."

A silence fell on them. She expected him to speak, but she had taken him unawares and he was still digesting her words.

"Hubert, don't you see how everything has come together to impel me to—to act as I have done?"

Long generations of chivalry were working in him. He cared for her enough to offer a sustaining hand.

"Nobody need ever know anything about them," he said at last, "if that's what is troubling you. I daresay there are plenty of Disses as there are plenty of Peytons. There might even be Peytons in Whitechapel for anything I know—or care."

She laughed and flung her arms about him, kissing him much the same as she would have done a schoolboy brother. He held her wrists.

"There, Nora, let the whole thing slide. If you want to go back to Australia for a bit, by all means go. But until then, you must stay with my sister."

"No, Hubert, let's end it now and keep friends still. I do value your friendship and want to keep it all my life. England is a disappointment—not England itself, with its beautiful old places, and historic spots and glorious ruins ; but the life, the people—and I've been lonely, oh, so lonely, in the midst of everything and everybody. That's one reason I rushed at you ; you were so frank and cordial, and you understood me. Whether it's the sun that's got into our blood and warmed us to greater affection, greater friendship, or whether it's just because we're an island all tucked away to itself at the other side of the world, I don't know ; but it is my own land I long for. And the sunshine is such a weary while coming to England."

He knew she was right. He knew, too, that now she was more rapidly approaching his ideal of women, or

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rather creating that ideal, than in the first stage of their friendship. Yet he felt glad of the freedom she was giving back to him. Once more the waste spaces of the world set up a call that was more insistent than mating or marriage. He was a traveller before he was anything else ; the vision of family ties had never been persistent enough for him to tire. Youth is prodigal of the long years in front of it.

She read his thoughts and stroked the hand that still held hers.

" I've not made you unhappy, Hubert, really. It's only that I've acted queerly ; but then I never could do things in straight lines. When they gave me ruled copybooks at school I was always miles away from the lines."

" Let us arrange it this way, Nora. Give it a little more thought, and write to me again, or send for me. Whatever you decide is final."

" Dear Hubert, I have already decided. Your heart says it is right."

" You know best," he said quietly. " Good-bye." This time he kissed her in the spirit of firm camaraderie.

" David and Jonathan," she laughed, and kissed him in return.

But when she was alone she wiped her eyes a little regretfully.

" He couldn't forget Whitechapel," she thought, " and I don't blame him. So it's all ended in smoke, and the first Australian girl to marry a duke hasn't had her biography written yet. And *my* particular fairy prince is still chopping in the enchanted forest. It's more than a hundred years since—since—— However, when I do go back I shall see Little Noah's Ark Limited once more. Oh, dear Lord ! Please put it in the hearts of the creditors to leave Little Noah's Ark Limited alone."

CHAPTER FORTY-SEVEN

Advertising is an alphabet of one thousand languages.

RABAN HEENE'S sudden appearance in England was due to the cable concerning Dick's accident.

Australian struck by a boomerang in Richmond Park.

ran the first announcement, leaving it to be inferred that somebody was practising with the native weapon, possibly for a music-hall turn. The second cable was more definite :

The Australian merchant, Mr. Richard Heene, who was the victim of a boomerang attack in Richmond Park, has sustained serious injuries.

To anyone who understood the deadly nature of a boomerang in flight this meant much more than "serious injuries." Raban Heene took up the cabling from his own code ; but he could hear so little to help him that he determined to go to England at once, and caught the mailboat at Port Adelaide. He cabled again at Perth, but no reply was forthcoming. There was nothing for it but to bear the run from Perth to Colombo, days upon days of helpless inactivity, wearisome, never-ending, with the same unchanging skyline, the huge ship nothing but a mere speck in that waste of waters that stretched away to the gulf of time.

To Raban Heene it was the most horrible part of his life, a veritable eternity of mute agony. He scarcely

tasted food and shrank into himself, looking more like a little grey wisp of a man than ever.

If Dick were dead the world held nothing of much moment. Sometimes when his misery hit him hardest he wondered how he could go on living, but the thought of those dependent on him for a livelihood braced him up. He had a keen sense of justice and understood that his work lay in keeping a grip on his business, and forcing his mind to be alive.

But at Colombo there was a cable from Dick himself, so reassuring that those who only knew Raban Heene from his three weeks' taciturnity could not believe their eyes at the change. He went off at Naples and concluded the journey overland.

Dick had time to recover by then, and there was little difference in him. He told his father the whole story, and in his delight at seeing him again perhaps he said too much. One subject led to another, and Dick described his visit to Southshire, but the elder Heene pulled him up sharply.

"That's how you lost over the Continental agents. I couldn't make out how it was before, now I see. Instead of clinching the deal with them, you go off on a jamboree to find the graves of your grandfathers. I told you, Dick, not to go messing about with grandfathers. What good will they do you? What's the good of grandfathers to the fibre? The Heenes were a low lot—rogues once, rogues always. There's some Heenes in the States fit to beat the band. I'd ha' been a rogue too, if the Australian sun hadn't sweated it out of me."

"But, father, think, it was Christmas. What business could I do at Christmas?"

"You ought to have fixed up the Continental fellers first, and not let the other side get in. However, it's done, so let's drop it. You've got to buy your experience. Now the best thing you can do is to trot along to-morrow and get 'em back."

"But I am treating with the others."

"Take it from me. Stick to the first lot. Make it worth their while to reconsider."

"You don't mean to cut prices?"

"Cut! Not much. Do as I tell you and raise prices."

Dick opened his eyes.

"How do you propose to do it?"

"By preventing Falcott from getting supplies. He's not got much as it is, and nobody knows who the Co. is. I heard it's a woman."

Dick's thoughts flew to the Louis d'Or.

"Anyhow, I'm here to find out. Somebody's trying to play a game of blind man's buff; but he—or she—will have to play it all alone."

"How did you hear it was a woman?"

"Campbell, our man, told me. It was before you left. Some woman came trailing round, making all sorts of sharp inquiries; a real nifty business brain he said she had, and went right at what she wanted to know. She was so different from any other female interested in the fibre that he stood off a bit, and asked her why she was so keen on it. 'I'm a writer,' she said, 'in search of new ideas.' But this didn't explain everything to his mind. Campbell's a canny head, and so he laid low; took care to say no more than what was already in the papers, gave the dates, couldn't find any prospectus, let the woman think there was a heap of fixing to do, and so forth. She riled him rather with her bossy manner, and her way of staring as if he were dirt, and left him with barely a 'thank you.'"

"Didn't she give her name?"

"'Mrs. Allen' was on a card she left; but she said she had a letter from me and had mislaid it. I never gave a letter to any woman. Before Campbell told me of this he got wind of an odd happening with the other dredging that's going on. The same inquisitive party was there too, in close confab with an engineer."

"Didn't Campbell notice her appearance?"

"Only her haughty-taughty manner and her stare. Not a young woman by any means."

"Ah, not golden hair, Merch's widow?"

"Not a bit. This one held some mighty good notion of herself and ordered folk around. Campbell got the idea that she was interested in the other dredging, and probably the head of the company. He tried to pump the engineer, but didn't get much, although he found out that they mean to offer the stuff for much less than it costs them so as to get it taken up. Of course they must clash against us for a bit at the start, but it's only a spasm."

Dick held out a batch of correspondence.

"The fibre satisfies everyone who gives it a fair trial, but they want it for less. Falcott offers it for less."

"We're not out to cut prices, my boy, but to get a better profit—a profit at which we can live. Falcott's price cannot get that margin of profit, therefore his trade is of no value, and I don't give a tinker's curse for his doings. Mark my words, his buyers will not value their source of supply, and when they drain him dry, and whatever others there are working the fibre, they'll be glad to treat with us. By that time they'll be a bit wiser than they are now."

"They need to be," said Dick. "I assure you, father, that some men here, and big men too, can't get it out of their heads that London is the sole market for Australia. They haven't an idea how we are trying for the great outer world. Then, again, the jealousy of the English business man is against extension. If you call on one man you mustn't let out that you are going to see another in the same trade, or you're done for. He would sooner let the trade drift than take you on. I heard it on the boat and didn't believe it, but here in London I have proved it."

"All business is just a matter of margin," said Raban Heene. "You can cut prices till you've cut your way to your own tombstone, and then lose the deal if the

buyer likes to wobble. As long as I'm capable of work I'll kick against this eternal screwing down of margins in any branch of trade. My rule is, and make it yours too, that if A. won't pay so much, let him slide and go to B., even if you have to track B. to Borneo. The shortsighted policy of buyers is a big factor in driving our Australian trade further afield."

"Yes, that's why I'm so glad to have interested this firm in Buenos Ayres."

"I believe in steady advertising and lots of it," continued Raban. "Sensational advertising is merely a flash in the pan if the stuff you advertise doesn't bring it out. You've not only to get publicity, you have to keep it. You have to make the buyer understand it's no fake or fashion of the moment, but a firm thing. It's only a question of the faith you have in the men behind the deal."

"The Berlin people steadily refuse our price."

"Let them. Berlin's pretty well done for as a trading centre, and Germany's rotten because of their everlasting cry of doing it cheaper. They have done it cheaper till they have next to cut their own throats, and the only way they can clear themselves is to have a war as soon as they find someone to fight with. They've lived beyond their means and their credit with the outer world; they have got beyond their depth, and it's up to any Englishman—or all Englishmen—to get their trade back, if they've any *nous*."

CHAPTER FORTY-EIGHT

A dream may be our daily bread.

FOR all Dick saw of Paris he could not have told what sort of a city it was, gay or grave, wicked or wise. Save that it was wonderfully clean and spruce for a big city, he took no interest in it. The few French words of his vocabulary seemed to dance hornpipes whenever he essayed them ; though everybody made heroic efforts to help him out and arrive at an understanding, his mental condition for the due appreciation of a beautiful city was befogged.

Not so his business aptitude, which thrived and obtained strength because of the concentration forced upon it. He could get no fun out of what he did not comprehend, therefore business supplied an outlet and kept him free from boredom.

Thrae & Enish were a Jewish firm of long established reputation and a world-wide trade. They took up nothing unless it promised a future ; while they were intent on their own interests, no man ever lost a penny by his dealings with them provided he was fair and above board. Jobbers and market riggers told another story.

There was a certain amount of racial resemblance between the two partners, accentuated by their talent for silence. They never interrupted a caller or a client, allowing him to talk himself into extinction if he chose. Thus they became possessed of a mass of information that always fitted in somewhere. It is the impatient

business man who loses time ; the patient adds to his minutes.

Heene plunged into his subject without preamble. Thrae, the senior partner, received him.

" My letter will have told you that I wish to open negotiations, but not on the same ground. I gather that you have settled definitely with the rival firm of Falcott & Co., for the Continental market ? "

Thrae did not answer the implied question. Heene was aware of his non-committal attitude and continued :

" Or whether your agreement permits of dealing with another firm ? "

" We never bind ourselves to a one-sided agreement, Mr. Heene. If two or more firms offer the same line at the same figure, and our market is large enough to take them on, we discuss them on their merits."

" Supposing another firm offers another variety, better treated or of higher finish, would you still retain the poorer class article, and act as agent for both ? "

Thrae looked at his questioner thoughtfully.

" The term ' poorer class ' is ambiguous ; it may imply anything. Let us speak more clearly."

" That I cannot do at present save this, that we are subjecting the fibre to some new treatment which will enhance its value."

" In that case we shall be very happy to deal with you."

" Thanks. That's about as far as we'll get to-day in this direction. By the way, here's the finest thread we have produced yet—there's the rough web."

Thrae silently drew the sample through his soft white fingers ; knotted, looped, tugged at it ; dipped the fibre in a tumbler of water and again pulled at it.

" Yes," he said quietly, " the stuff has a future. We said so at first ; but it will take much building up. This is the finest product I have seen. Can you do this at the same rate as the first you sent us ? "

" Oh, no. This is nearly double. We have patented our process."

" Then we can't take it up."

" Yes, you can and will. I'll come again in three months with a still better sample, and hear your opinion then."

" No use, unless you can put it on the market cheaply."

" We don't want to put it on the market cheaply. We have to get back the thousands and thousands of pounds spent on special cleaning machinery, special dredging boats, and special Manchester skill."

Mr. Thrae shook his head and smiled almost sadly. This young man spoke with the enthusiasm of youth and Australia, than which country there is no greater for ardent hopes and aspirations.

Dick saw the smile and resolved to live up to it, soar beyond it.

" Dreams," said Mr. Thrae, not unkindly, " dreams."

" Well, why shouldn't we put our dreams into harness and get some practical work out of them? "

" It would only be a nightmare," responded the other, permitting himself to joke. Dick laughed frankly. It pleased him to find Mr. Thrae asking questions about the product and jotting down memoranda.

The three days spent in Paris were occupied in plan-laying of this kind, putting up the scaffolding, as he phrased it.

His agent was a smart young Englishman who had emerged from a London office to settle in Paris, which was not the same thing as the years of training to be obtained only in the great European capitals. He possessed plenty of ability, marred by the Englishman's dislike to hustling, and the Australian thought him too dandified for real success. Yet he made headway, and showed a touch of real greatness in refusing to treat with a German firm.

" There's no real gain in the offer," he said. " A

colossal deal on the surface with nothing behind it." Heene agreed. Several offers from German firms were coming in, all for large quantities of the fibre, but not one showed a margin of profit. The German idea seemed to be an insistent desire to get possession of huge supplies, to the exclusion of other nations, and by tempting the Australian firm with these large orders, cut them down to the lowest rates.

But Raban Heene held to his own ideas about Germany and refused to deal.

Such hours of relaxation as Dick allowed himself in Paris were spent with Maurice Darley, living in his studio in the Rue Edgar Quinet, and working well on a statue of Victor Hugo, the commission of a French nobleman.

Darley's *amour propre* had received a shock over the Louis d'Or, and he sought out old haunts and old ghosts of his student days to disburden his mind.

He was not an enthusiastic Australian like his niece or Dick Heene. Years of non-appreciation had warped his views ; his friends were not many and his kinship strained.

Sometimes he gave way to fits of depression because of the small result of life and ability. As a cure he set off walking at a furious rate to Fontainebleau or even further. The miles made a different man of him. He grew ashamed of moods that are as much the common property of an artisan as an artist.

He endeavoured to show the Paris he loved to Heene, " like a beautiful woman smiling," he said ; but Heene's ideas of beauty settled on long stretches of sun-kissed country, with curving bush roads without sign of habitation, above all the intoxicating scent of the young gums. That was one picture. Another was the great grey silent land where the trees ranged themselves like serried sentinels ; where one might get in tune with eternity.

"It gives me the horrors," declared the sculptor. "I hate the gums and the grey silence. How a practical young chap like you can go daft about them beats me."

Heene smiled a little wistfully.

"We all have our dreams."

"Yes, boy. If it wasn't for our dreams we would lose heart for the everlasting fight. Dreams are our daily bread. It may be that it is the dreams that are real, and this life the make-believe. I had a dream the other night that has kept its grip yet. I dreamt that I was dead, and that in death it was given me to be the great Phidias for one hour. In that one hour I set out to find my masterpiece. I wandered through the galleries of the world and found it at last shrunken and battered and broken in a poor student's room cheering him on, even in starvation, to hope, to bring out the best in him, to endure and win. Then I returned to death happy that I had enriched the world in the enriching of a rare human soul. It seemed that in the last moments of that strange dream I had discovered the secret of real greatness. Well has it been said that the ancients lost more than we moderns ever knew. The moderns will lose more still, for they care nothing for art and its workers. Look at Storey's grave in Highgate Cemetery, sunken, weed-grown, forgotten."

Darley and Dick Heene were not well fitted to be chums, for Heene, despite his years, was really the older and the graver of the two. Darley, much his senior, could laugh and joke with the irresponsibility of a Bohemian, and like a Bohemian sink to the depths of despair.

Heene was free from this. His natural gravity was more pronounced because of Nora's defection. The memory of the quarrel was ever present. It was his fault, but she was the instigator. However, she was lost to him now, and life held no time for vain regrets.

Darley never manifested much interest in his family.

His sister's social gods were to him senseless ; the niece he would have loved was unknown to him.

Dick Heene was well out of a pickle, he thought, but he kept these things to himself.

Notwithstanding his artist's whims and vagaries, Darley was true metal and devoted to the Heenes. Dick could discuss his affairs without fear, and find the relief of a companion. The sculptor followed the fortunes of the fibre with interest.

" I've picked up a bit of news that may be of interest," he greeted Dick cheerily. " Has it ever occurred to you that this rival Falcott & Co. is only a dummy ? "

" No, he's real enough ; I've spoken to him."

" Yes ; but the power behind the throne. Falcott's only a name. The real firm is a woman."

" Eh ? Why, that's my old dad's idea."

" He's dead right if something I know fits in. Three or four days ago I met someone——"

" The Louis d'Or ? " Darley nodded.

" I tried to avoid her, but she fastened on me. What her object was I couldn't fathom. She wished to be friends, not to let an old acquaintance be lost ; felt herself a sufferer by my attitude, and so on. I was angry and let her see it. I taxed her with that boomerang business ; she swore by all the gods that she was innocent ; that you had traduced her, and what not. I couldn't get away from her. But in the midst of her ravings she let out this : that you fancied you were working against a *bona fide* English firm, whereas it was a lady of title running the show, and Falcott only a blind."

" How on earth could she get such information ? Falcott wouldn't be such a fool as to give the game away—and who's the lady of title ? "

" I don't believe she knew. It struck me at the time she had a grievance against this lady of title ; that she had been the means of putting information in her way without recompense, and it made her wild."

"I see it," said Dick. "To pay me out she gave our Continental firm's name to Falcott. He cut in and undersold us; but the Louis d'Or made nothing on the deal. If there's a lady of title at the back of it she's scarcely likely to be friends. Did you speak of Engadee?"

"Yes, and let her understand she'll have to explain her position; but she bluffed me with a ready assent to meet the other side in a business-like way. The matter concerned the Diss family, nobody else, and as you had tried to blast her reputation—I repeat her own words—she intends to oppose you in every particular."

"I knew that without her telling."

"She swears she is innocent of any fraud concerning Engadee. I cut her short by saying I no more believed this statement now than when she made it before. Then she went off into a lot of personal matter, and I cleared out."

Dick guessed the "personal matter" referred to another attempt at love-making, but said nothing.

"Practically she's above the law," continued Darley. "Nothing can be proved against her—about Engadee, I mean—and the only hold you have on her is the boomerang attempt."

"I'll bring her to her knees that way if all else fail," declared Dick. "I have sworn to make her disgorge."

His companion guessed the impelling force that lay behind the words, and sighed to himself over unrequited loyalty and chivalry.

CHAPTER FORTY-NINE

“ Yes ” and “ No ” were born twins, but were separated in infancy.

THEN the sky flamed into high noon and business matters flew ahead with the magic of hope. The floors of Dick's scaffolding were of glistening silver and the uprights of fine gold. Just a few words in a letter and a life was changed in the making.

The elder Heene, after touching on commercial affairs, wrote :

Probably you have heard the news of Jo Ireton's bankruptcy. Nora Diss is here with me until Friday, when she returns to Melbourne. She has had a bust-up with the bandit baroness who was running her, and the engagement to the duke is off.

Nora Diss at Portchester Gardens! The fates were working for him after all.

Dick hustled his French acquaintances that day to such an extent that they called him a barbarian, until they looked at his eyes, when they shook hands instead. Though he did not possess seven-league boots, he felt the modern equivalent of springs in his heels.

Maurice Darley sniffed.

“ The whole lot of you are suffering from emotional hysterics, and you'll be worse before you are better. Love-making is much the same experience as losing a train. You worry the guard, and the guard doesn't care. No man should marry before he's thirty, unless he's born to patriarchal acres. If he's got to hustle to set a

business on its legs the commercial muse ought to be his divinity. When you're a bit older you'll think as I do : that every love has its three periods, its birth, its efflorescence, and its decay. Carry the simile even further. Say that every love that plunges its roots deep into the ground leaves the soil useless for any other growth."

Dick laughed good-humouredly and suggested that his friend was trying to live up to the statue of Victor Hugo. Philosophy was wasted on him. He shook hands and cut short any further talk with an " All right, old chap ; see you some day," and flew to the station, stopped the taxi half-way and entered a jeweller's. Nora must have a souvenir of Paris ; but this was not the simple matter of mere thought. He wanted something unusual, the only piece of its kind in the world. He would have loved to give her a ring, but she might think he was taking too much for granted. Bangles, brooches, bracelets were common. He said " No, no ! " so often, and shook his head so vigorously, that the polite salesman took counsel with his chief. Between them they brought out a trifle that Oberon first thought about when he made up his quarrel with Titania, and allowed some mortal to have a glimpse of it so that it might be copied for queens of the heart in human guise.

It seemed like a fairy wand, just a narrow line of gold and blue ; but from this unfurled leaves of gossamer shot with the tints of the rainbow, with a delicate landscape suggested more than painted on each leaf. The ivory studs and rays were inlaid with turquoise and moonstone, and the soft shimmer and gleam made him think of the far-away Australian night he asked her to be his wife, and she had yearned for England.

They smilingly asked him two thousand francs. He paid it in such delight that they regretted such a low price. For a moment Dick tormented himself, wondering whether the duke had given her such a present, and,

if so, whether she had returned it. Then he threw away doubt and disillusion. She was free once more, and his chance stood high.

It was Thursday evening when he arrived in London. Nora was to sail the following day.

"Only a few hours to make good," he thought rather nervously, but his spirits did not desert him. Late as it was, they were waiting dinner.

Nora, after half a dozen battles with herself over the way she should treat Dick for his surliness, arrived at no decision and restlessly watched the clock. She tried to make fun of herself.

"The tickings of the clock are always supposed to be stabs to the distressed heroine; but with me they play an everlasting two-step, and one second has a limp—hear it. Perhaps I am not intended for a heroine."

She listened for the sound of wheels, sitting rigidly when the cab stopped and Dick jumped out. It was wise to treat him coolly. He deserved it. But, as he gained the portal in his next leap, Nora swept past Raban Heene into the hall with a smiling "How are you, Dick?"

He seized her hand before he spoke to his father and looked hard into her eyes.

"Nora!"

"Did you have a good time in Paris, Dick?" she asked demurely.

"Bother Paris! Nora! I—I——" and before the elder Heene or the sympathetic landlady could scuttle out of the way he had snatched her into a mad embrace and kissed her. It was a courting of seconds. Perhaps, rather, the true sequence of the other courting months before under the Southern Cross.

Then they stood staring at each other in silence. Though her inches, added to her heels, raised her eyes above his, the man's ardour obliterated the sense of height.

Dick couldn't find a word after this successful

storming of the citadel. Nora made a desperate clutch at her lost self-possession and began to laugh.

"Here we are, a twentieth century man and woman, with all the wealth of the English language on their tongues, yet unable to utter a syllable."

"Is it all right between us, Nora?"

"No, Dick, it's all wrong. I'm going back to Melbourne to-morrow and we mightn't ever see each other again."

"Pooh! I'm going back myself soon. Australia is not big enough to play hide-and-seek in. So let's settle it at once, Nora."

"Settle what?"

"Now what do you think I am talking about?"

"That's what I'm trying to find out."

"Oh, you girls! How you love to pretend. As if you didn't know, when I've spent all my life—the grown-up part, anyway—in the endeavour to show what you are to me."

"And *what* am I?" she asked mischievously, inviting what was to come.

"This," he said, with another kiss.

"Talk about being made love to by a whirlwind!" protested Nora in a smothered voice.

"I'm twenty-eight, and for the last ten years I've been trying to get a word in for myself, so I can't see where the whirlwind holds good. You really do care for me, Nora?"

"It has that appearance," she replied, provokingly. Then the sweetness of her nature shone out and she touched his face caressingly.

"Poor, dear, darling old Dick! There's not a man living can put a patch on you!"

"Go ahead!" commented Dick in ecstasy. "That's what I call real poetry. Shakespeare never said anything better. Try some more, Nora."

"Come to dinner," laughed Nora. "I'm starving. That's blank verse. I'm an all-round genius."

"Half a second. Here's a keepsake for you from

Paris, Nora." He gave her the slim little packet containing Oberon's makepeace offering to Titania.

But Raban Heene grew impatient. He stalked forward, caught the pair of them in his arms, and pushed them into the room where dinner waited.

After awhile the conversation turned to business affairs and Dick's doings in Paris, when Maurice Darley's information was repeated.

"A woman of title!" exclaimed Nora and Raban Heene together. The same thought occurred to both.

"It can't be possible," said the elder Heene.

"I'm certain it is," nodded Nora, "from something I overheard."

"What's the mystery?" demanded Dick.

"Lady Rose was at the telephone one day. I heard her distinctly ask for 'Falcott,' and about a week later somebody named Falcott came to see her."

"She's it!" declared Raban. "I see her now alongside Campbell's description, haughty-taughty manner and stare. She tried the haughty-taughtiness on me, but it didn't work. Have you seen this Lady Rose Allway, Dick?"

"Once, at the Government House ball; not over here. I wouldn't know her again."

"I have her picture," said Nora. "I don't remember which box it's in; everything's gone save cabin stuff—but you shall have it directly I can get hold of it."

Raban Heene left them for a little. If the steering of the wheel of destiny had been in his hands he could not have been better pleased. He liked to think himself blessed as a father. In the hourglass of time among the sands there are specks of gold, or perhaps diamond dust, and sometimes they flutter into men's lives and make for happiness.

Nora's joy over the fan redoubled that of her lover.

"I wish I had bought a ring too," he said, "but I wasn't bold enough for that."

"Plenty of time," smiled Nora.

"I'll do it to-morrow morning. What would you like, sweetheart?"

"Not diamonds. I want blue stones for luck; to remind me of the sea and sky, and misty mountain tops, and the alpine flower that I have seen growing only once in England, as well as our own little forget-me-not; the true blue of dear old England; the blue of mystery that banks the Southern Cross on a summer night; the strong sturdy blue of the Union Jack. Sapphires, sapphires! Only sapphires hold the romance and the realism of everything that is beautiful in the whole world."

They talked of Engadee and its English prototype, Engledree. Feeling he could speak now on a subject closed to all else, he told her of the strange and inexplicable happenings that held together with a curious consistency.

"Nora, when you go back, make Engadee your first care. You may discover something, or something may be revealed to you, the daughter of the man swindled out of his own."

"Yes, but Dick, dear, mother can't embark on a lawsuit. She has no money, and poor dad's insolvency will about tie up everything in a double knot."

"You do as I say, Nora. My old dad will find the money. He said so. I know the agents haven't had a better bid than mine, from what I can gather. The trouble will be in getting hold of Stephen Merch's widow, the Louis d'Or. She'll not face me after the boomerang business, and Darley let her slip through his fingers, though he couldn't very well stick her up."

On the morrow Nora left England wearing Dick's engagement ring, a cluster of lustrous sapphires. With characteristic promptitude he was at a jeweller's in Regent Street while the shutters were being taken down. Twenty minutes later the ring was on Nora's finger, with a fraction of time to the good for an embrace.

Quite a little gathering went down to Tilbury to see her off, Sir Samuel Gisbon and his wife, among others, and a few of the acquaintances she had made in London. The news of her departure and the reason were already known.

Sir Samuel gave her a wad of banknotes.

"Put that in your pouch, Nora, just in case you run short. I hate to think of a girl being stuck up for cash. Tell Jo Ireton I'll not be long before I'm back myself; we'll get the last of the brood off next week. I wish you could have stayed for the wedding, and then good-bye to fogs and smoke, and the damndest climate I ever struck. I want to get my old bones warm again before I die—save Old Nick a lot of trouble."

CHAPTER FIFTY

All fairy tales do not circle round Cinderella, though the glass slipper is an invariable feature.

LADY ROSE was awaiting callers in her house near Berkeley Square, with her everlasting Irish crochet in her fingers and another sort of crochet in her head.

After giving precise instructions how the visitors were to be attended to, in case they arrived inconveniently near each other, she took up a strategic position in the morning-room, which held a knee-hole writing table as methodically kept, and as full of business matter, as any city man's.

Lady Rose never troubled about elaborate dressing and never departed from her severely cut princess robe, no matter what the fashion was, for her figure was her pride, and she felt herself above fashion. Possessing a marvellous sense of textures, her choice was unerring where fabrics were concerned, and her taste ran to full deep tints.

Mr. Joshua Nix was the first to arrive.

"Thank you, my lady, for sending me the American widow."

"I hope you can settle something for her."

"To tell you the truth, my lady, she's rather—well, rather rough. The husband made his money in pigs, and she seems rather proud of it. 'Even pigs have helped history in the past,' she said, and wanted to cut me down. I refused. I never lowered my terms, I told her—ten guineas for a consultation, one hundred

guineas for achievement, and in several instances a testimonial in jewellery. But she—demurred.”

“She appeared to me anxious to make something out of her own name used as a prefix to her husband’s.”

“The double ‘e’ might open a track,” admitted Josh, “only so many are affecting double ‘e’s’ now. I suggested ‘ey,’ but she ‘guessed not,’ because she held her own double ‘e’ to be *genuwine*. That’s what they all think.”

The expert spoke rather wearily, as if the lack of intelligence amongst possible clients threw a woeful sidelight on the ways of plutocrats in general, and double-breasted plutocrats in particular. Nomenclature as an art was to them as pearls before swine.

She let him talk on, contemptuous in her heart, as she was of all mankind; merely waiting to use the axe that was never away from the grinding-stone.

“I really wrote to you to put some other work into your hands, Mr. Nix, but the people have had a family bereavement and will not be in London this season, so it must wait.”

“Your ladyship makes me bankrupt in thanks.”

“There is no better authority in these matters.”

“I wish I could express my appreciation in a practical fashion, my lady, but *you* are not in want of a pedigree. That young lady whose family record I—er—traced, was she satisfied?”

“Don’t mention her! She was most ungrateful, and her wretched family are beneath contempt. She left me to pay all the debts I incurred on her behalf.”

“Indeed, my lady, I am shocked.”

“Even your fee I had to pay.”

If this were intended to lead up to a return of the twenty pound cheque to Mr. Nix it failed to hit the mark. The expert merely lengthened his face commiseratingly, and sighed some soft exclamation of regret.

“What strange people one meets in this world.”

He met the stony blue eyes with a stare of his own. The Nix stare was like a whitewashed wall.

"It would have worried me terribly," continued the lady, "because I am too sensitive in my friendships, but fortunately I had something that demanded all my thought and energy. A new canvas fibre has been discovered in Australia, and is being exploited by several influential people. I had a number of shares offered me at a low figure. It was a splendid chance of making money and I took it at once."

After this somewhat intimate disclosure to one she deemed no more than a minnow in the river of life, she made sure of a nibble from the fish. But the fish was wary from the experience of many waters, and saw the shadow of the line before it was thrown.

"I am sorry you spent your money, my lady, for these new discoveries are rigged up by the dozen; nobody hears anything of them afterwards."

Inside her closed mouth Lady Rose jammed her teeth viciously together, but Josh's whitewashed wall of a stare saw nothing.

"In this case I took the trouble to go on the spot and inspect everything myself. Financiers like Macker Snell do not spend thousands over mere experiments."

"Is *he* in it?" asked Josh animatedly. She thought he had swallowed the hook.

"He's one. There's half a dozen others, including Lord Groundage, and a Cabinet minister."

"Who let 'em in?" asked Josh.

"What do you mean?"

"Why, who's been pulling their l—I beg your pardon, my lady, there must be some explanation of how they were had—I mean victimized. Or perhaps it's another case of, or rather a variation on, loss of memory—loss of mind."

"How stupidly you talk. As if men of such position would not make it their business to *know*."

"There's no accounting for what may happen to a

man. For my part I would never try speculation ; I don't believe in it. I just stick to the line of art that I have made my life work, like that poor cat that could only run up a tree."

With this sententious remark he rose to take his leave, bowing in the old-fashioned way, and never so presumptuous as to offer to shake hands. When he was on the other side of the front door, he made a *sotto voce* remark to the spirits of the summer afternoon :

" Old devil ! Too thin ! "

Inside the morning-room Lady Rose was ejaculating " Miserable worm ! I'll drop him ! "

The " worm " was scarcely off the premises when a visitor at the other end of the social scale was announced. Of the two Lady Rose could not help remarking that the meaner man looked the more distinguished. This was the Cabinet Minister for whom she was angling.

" How good of you to come," she said graciously. " I could have called on you and saved your time."

" It's the first I've heard of a lady trying to save a man's time," was his cheerful rejoinder. " Quite a pleasure to call on you, Lady Rose, always sure of an interesting chat ; wish women would take your point of view ; trouble with women, no matter how clever or cultured, they don't see from all sides. How's the Australian swindle going on ? Will you make a bit on it ? "

" Every penny I possess is in it, as I told you, and I sent for you to have a serious talk over it. I want your help."

" No, no, no, my dear Lady Rose. I'm not going to be got at. Where's a poor devil like me to find money for financing ? "

" My good man, I am not asking you to finance it. It's a case of your vote and interest."

" You want me to recommend the stuff ? "

" Not without you are satisfied it's worth it. All I ask is that you get your colleagues interested ; show

them the samples. Here are all the memoranda of work, expense, preparations, machinery, processes ; you must get the Government to take it up."

"What for?"

"To use it in Government service, of course. The Admiralty, the Army, Civil Service——"

He burst out laughing.

"What sort of a wind d'you want for this kite? It strikes me we'll have to bag a bit off the simoon or monsoon or typhoon—or——"

"I am content with genuine trade winds."

Forthwith she commenced to hold forth like a textbook. He listened readily enough. The matter was interesting ; he might as well have the credit of introducing a new material. After all, there was no point of honour, or dishonour, involved.

She was much too skilful to talk to him about shares or the financial aspect from a speculative angle. Nor was he a man to be bribed. What he could do if he chose must be by reason of long friendship.

"I can reckon on your support?" she wound up, after an epitome that did her brain credit.

"My support, yes, so far as it goes. But I can promise no more than that. I can't force it down people's throats, you know ; and there's lots of more urgent matter in hand. However, I'll do what I can."

He, too, went away with a muttered communication to the summer wind :

"Clever old girl ! Trust a woman for wire-pulling."

He soon found that the wires should have been pulled earlier to be of any use, for on mentioning the new material he learnt to his surprise that it was already on the market, pushed by an Australian who not only pulled wires but sent wheels spinning in every direction. Which shows that it is not inadvisable for a Cabinet Minister to take the wool from his ears—occasionally, if only to hear of the demise of Queen Anne.

CHAPTER FIFTY-ONE

What would the English language do without its deleted
“D——”?

THE spider was waiting next morning as usual, but the Irish crochet was temporarily put aside in favour of a letter. She gave a glance at the clock now and then, and grew irritable.

“Nearly an hour late. Perhaps he’ll not come. Ah! the bell!” She assumed a pleasanter expression. The expected fly would take fright at a frown.

“Lord Groundage.”

Accession to a title had scarcely improved his appearance, for, despite all his tailor could do for him, there was a discontented, half-awake expression in his face, and a slovenly hunching of the shoulders together that marred his one-time jauntiness.

“Good boy, Vincent, I was going to give you up.”

“If you had the morning I’ve had you’d wonder I’m jolly well here at all.”

“Anything wrong?”

“The whole caboozalem’s wrong. I say, Lady Rose, do you feel inclined to play good Samaritan?”

“For how much?”

“How jolly smart you are. I must raise a thousand pounds by to-morrow, or I’m——” He clicked his lips together as expressive of utter extinction.

“I want a thousand pounds myself, not by to-morrow certainly, but this day week. I’ve been let in shamefully by these wretched Australians.”

He nodded sympathetically, if a wooden expression could be sympathetic.

"Of all the bally countries on earth, that cursed hole takes the cake. I date all my bad luck to going there."

"You mean to leaving there," she corrected with a smile.

"What's the difference? It's *there*, anyway. I wish the skunk broke his bally neck. But I say, Lady Rose, you must help me. I've done you a good turn before now."

"I have remembered it some time ago and never asked repayment."

"Oh, don't be so jolly smart!" he exclaimed petulantly. "Are you practising for a what's-its-name? Because I'm in no mood for wit this morning. I feel just like chucking it!"

"You're always feeling like chucking it," she struck in sharply. "Why don't you pull yourself together and get some sort of a job?"

"How the devil can I with that beastly Australian business cropping up!"

"You have friends. Can't they get you something in Trinidad, or the West African——"

"Or the South Pole at once."

"Well, why not the South Pole? You've got to make up your mind to rough luck if you want to feel your feet again. Go anywhere, take anything, that's my advice, and your friends can track out some sort of a career for you; but not if you go haunting gambling hells."

He jumped up in a tantrum and moved about the room.

"See here, I'm in no mood for sermons."

"It never was one of your strong points."

"What d'you want me for?"

"Sit down and I'll tell you."

He flung himself into a chair again, but before she

could broach her subject he was reverting to his own affairs.

"I say, Lady Rose, *can* you lend me anything? Five hundred pounds would stave off ruin, and you've got whacks."

"Indeed, I have not. Get *that* out of your head. Did I not tell you I'm landed with all that wretched girl's expenses?"

"Didn't the old chap ante-up after all?"

"What do you mean by 'after all'?"

"Why, they said in Melbourne that you landed him for a clean £5,000."

"It's a lie."

"But you got something?"

"Not one penny!" Lady Rose could rise to great heights.

Lord Groundage whistled.

"If anyone else had told me that! And I rated you the niftiest business woman I ever met."

"I am a good business woman in another way, and that way I intend to stick to for the future. I told you in Melbourne about the product in which I was interested."

"Yes, the bally something that grew out there in the sea—somewhere."

"Marine fibre. I've invested every penny I possess in it."

"Silly. You know nothing about the bally thing except what those bounders have stuffed you with."

"I made it my business to learn everything. There's a rival company at work and I must get ahead of them. That's why I sent for you. I want you to see several men——"

"ME! What in thunder can *I* do? I'm not a commercial traveller!"

"Then it's about time you tried to be one. With your family connections you could make a decent thing of it, if you would only sling aside the gambling

hells. Let me finish. I have thought it all out. You can take this up and work it well, if you'll do as I say. Call on these: here's a list of a dozen men I've made out, all in high offices and most of them connected with your family. Let them think you are vitally interested, and have money at stake, as I do. Get them to push it——"

"Lord! I never pushed anything in my life!"

"Then begin under my influence and I'll help you."

"What! Lend me the thou! You're a brick!"

"A thousand—where can I get it? Don't be absurd. Every farthing is in this. But I'll lend you a couple of hundred——"

"What good's that?"

"You might pay me the compliment of hearing me out. You shall have two hundred down, and for every certain name you bring in another fifty pounds. If you get ten out of these twelve, that's seven hundred in all."

The flare of hope died out of his face, leaving it more wearily red and discontented.

"I never earned fifty pounds in my life, except the measly screw in that bally place."

"Then begin now. I want this material to be taken up by the Admiralty. I myself am seeing the highest in the land."

The magnitude of her aims appalled him. He actually squirmed at the idea of what she asked.

"You have to do it, Vincent, and start this very day. Otherwise you are no use to me. The other lot are working might and main."

"Who are they?"

"Australians. That fellow you had the row with at Government House——"

"What—Heene?"

"The same, and his father, with others. Think what a crow for you to get even with them."

She hit the right nail. Lord Groundage hated Richard Heene; to intensify that hate was the ever-recurrent reminder of the affair by his acquaintances.

"Gimme the list," he said in a quicker voice. "I'll have a shy at it anyhow."

"Mind, they must be certain. No half-and-half promises. Go first to the relations who take your part over that Melbourne business. Let them think you are resolved to do something. Impress that on their wives—or any woman of social importance. I know well enough you could marry quite decently, in spite of chatter, if you only had the wit to work."

"I'll do my best. But the two hundred quid?"

She went to her writing-table and wrote out a cheque. He followed, watching the pen.

"I say, Lady Rose, give's a leg-up. Make it five hundred."

She signed her name without any alteration.

"Get six names by to-morrow—and I will."

The spirits of the summer afternoon were hearing confidences in that fashionable quarter, for he, too, muttered discontentedly:

"Close-fisted old cat! How am I to get the bally six names?"

What Lady Rose did not know and was too petty a schemer to understand is that wirepulling as a commercial motive power has no chance besides a first-class banker. Much of the business of the world is carried along by people who have never seen one another. This is where the good banker comes in. He recommends one party to another because he wants employment for his money; he wants interest for his money. As interest is another name for profit he cannot afford to take risks with undesirables, or he loses his character and his credit. The whole scheme of foreign commerce is really carried on on an enormous credit system, the credit of the characters standing behind the deal.

The spider awaited her next visitor with more trepidation than she had manifested towards the others. He came quick to the hour.

" Mr. Bernard Ireton."

This was Joseph Ireton's brother, a man of some note in the Coast Protection Department, a valuable ally if she could win him. A pallid, sharp-looking man of fifty, he bore the stamp of officialism over every inch of him, quite the contrast of his big, cheerful, untidy brother at the Antipodes.

" I hope you did not think my request strange, Mr. Ireton ; but it was easier for me to see you here than go to your office, especially as I heard you were not really resuming duties after your holiday till the first of the month."

" That's quite so. My wife's still abroad. We can't get into our house for a week or two. I was looking forward to seeing my brother's step-daughter. What does it all mean ? I've heard nothing about his financial troubles."

" I also am in absolute ignorance. But Nora heard and flew off at a moment's notice. I must say her behaviour—well—well, it hurt me terribly, for I had tried to get the girl on her feet here in England. Through me she met the young Duke of Reith and they were engaged. But she broke off everything and rushed back to Melbourne."

" Extraordinary. Did not my brother write to you ? "

" Not a line, and I have been under—serious expense through arranging matters for his stepdaughter."

" Oh, but surely he'll not allow you to be out of pocket. That would be—oh, no, that's impossible."

" The whole thing's impossible. Mr. Ireton, they are impossible people. Australia is an impossible country. Some transformation goes on there we English do not understand. Nora actually brought a man here named Heene, who declared himself an old friend of her father's, or stepfather's."

" Heene ? " The name was sharply uttered.

" Yes. Have you heard of him ? "

" He's a business man."

"She went off with him, that's all I know."

"I'll see him ; he may be able to tell me something more. He's a capitalist, good standing, oh, quite all right. Australians as I know them are reliable and straight, though rather impatient of forms and ceremonies. It's the climate. I shouldn't worry. What was the other matter you wished to see me about ? "

Thereupon Lady Rose diplomatically bottled up her wrath against the absentees and settled herself for the due telling of her fairy tale. Before she had spoken a dozen words her visitor interrupted.

"Marine fibre, you say ? A stuff that works out like cotton, indestructible, and all that ? "

"Yes, yes, you've heard of it ? " she asked eagerly, feeling that fortune was attuning her face to a smile. But with his answer the house of cards toppled over.

"That's the stuff this Heene—Heene Limited—has just succeeded in inducing the Admiralty to take up."

"Damn ! " said Lady Rose—after he had gone.

CHAPTER FIFTY-TWO

Our relations are our fetters, but they wear *their* rue with a difference.

“ DEAREST DICK,

“ At my own little desk, in my own little crib, at the dear old Launching Place once more.

“ How it came about sounds like a page torn from a fairy tale in the waving of a wand. Yet it took six weeks, all the time I was on the water.

“ Probably you’ve heard the news yourself before me, for I was quite in the dark as to what was happening until I arrived. I pictured dad and the mater half dead with worry, yet there they were, smiling and sperky as ever.

“ ‘ Why ever did you leave London ? ’ said the mater, and though they pretended it was foolish and uncalled for, they were both pleased at my return. I took the mater aside and told her everything. It was the most breathless five minutes I ever had in my life, trying to make matters clear, and to head off comment.

“ ‘ But the Duke ? ’ she kept saying. ‘ The Duke ? ’

“ Poor mater ; she has a longing for dukes that will never be gratified.

“ ‘ I like Dick best,’ was all I said, and she knows her child better than to argue the point. Dearest of Dicks, you will have to be prepared for just a *leetle* coldness on her part when you return ; but remember she’s been done out of a duke for a son-in-law, and you must overlook frigidity. She did try to show the error of my ways, but I closed down with ‘ Now, mater dear, it

wasn't at all nice of you and dad to chaffer about me, and settle my future with Lady Rose Allway, who hasn't a good word to say for you or any other Australian for that matter, so let's drop the subject.'

"She's a good sort, the mater, with a heart of gold, and just ended up with the usual maternal sigh over spilt milk. Dad shrugged his big shoulders—I told him he would make a good Atlas—and kissed me.

" 'As long as you're happy, kiddie, I don't care.'

"It isn't every girl who has such a well-regulated family as mine.

"I told them of the Whitechapel Disses and my adventure to the home of my kinsfolk, much to the mater's disquietude, though dad howled with laughter. He felt a bit annoyed over Mrs. Admiralty Ireton for not inviting me, even if Mr. Admiralty was on sick leave. Dad's feasted *their* crowd often enough. I've heard it said Australians are fools with their hospitality. Now I believe it.

"About his affairs and the waving of the magic wand. Two friends of his put their heads together and squared up everything. Dad had really been forced into insolvency because of the action of his partners in the wretched opal swindle, but, as you said, he could clear himself by sales of runs, and this he has done. Nobody will lose a penny piece. We ourselves shall be poor compared with the past, but that's nothing. We have the Launching Place and the three thousand acres adjoining. That was settled on mother years ago. Everything else has gone, the racing stud, stable and all that. I am in no way minimizing the smash, but it's heaven to what I feared.

"The loveliest welcome home came from Little Noah's Ark Limited. It is safe, and the dear creatures remembered me after six months' absence.

"The kangaroos took hops and leaps as if they were demented, uttering queer little cries of joy and resting their soft heads on my hands. Then I gave them the

word to wrestle, but they would only go half through with the bout, because they kept watching me so sharply, for fear I might disappear. They failed also in the boxing, seemed to have forgotten all about it, and they used to make quite a decent fist.

"The native companions recognized my voice and started their quadrille automatically, while the 'possum lay at my feet, its eyes just blinking with bliss.

"The best at their turns were the magpie and the cockatoo, as they had been at them continually. The cockatoo has developed a new trick of calling the cats, 'Puss, puss, puss!' When they run expectantly he tosses them corn from his perch. A clear proof of humour in parrots. You should see the cats' look of annoyance, their faces askew with disgust. Yet they run every time, so well does he imitate the cook's voice.

"As might be expected, the pony and the dogs were the most intelligent, coming up at once to proffer paws of welcome, while their faithful eyes shone. The native bear alone manifested no joy, and still looks a helpless, uncompleted bit of creation.

"The humorist of the show is still the monkey. He has taken to pretending to read the paper with a pair of spectacles thieved from someone.

"There was only one loss, you can guess what that was. The dingo. Nobody knows how or where; they say he moped after I left. I've a theory that he grew lonely, and having nothing to occupy his mind reverted to atavism. Possibly hearing some wild bush brethren one night, like the dog in the story, he howled back in answer, and that howl awoke suppressed family affection, so he went. Poor little chap! I don't blame him. The boys are trying to get me another.

"Next day I started them on rehearsal, because I want them up to concert pitch for a hospital charity.

"Good-bye, sweetheart, hurry up and come home. Don't take all my love. Leave a bit for dear old England—the England that I dreamed of seeing in June.

Here is June, the June of the Southern Cross, with clear cold days and trickling creeks, and all the wondersome things of our wondersome sun-kissed South ; but it isn't the English June. All the fairy tales were told in June. Dick, my darling, when we are married, you must squeeze out the time somehow for a honeymoon in the English June.—Yours much,

“ NORA.

“ This sounds like a postscript. It isn't. I never write them, but probably you shall hear of something surprising next week if I can pull it off.”

The “ something surprising ” was a visit to Engadee which Nora made by herself. Once her mind settled on a course of action she cared little what work might be entailed.

“ I've done it,” she wrote, “ seen Engadee, walked through the rooms, poked my nose into every hole and corner, and found nothing—I mean nothing as yet, but you shall hear.

“ The mater raised trouble when I suggested a visit.

“ ‘ You can't go by yourself, child.’

“ ‘ Then come with me.’

“ ‘ Now, Nora, you know how rough travelling knocks me up, and this wretched place seems to be in the heart of nowhere.’

“ ‘ Well, I must say, mater, you take it pretty coolly, as if you didn't care a rap. If it's really built with father's money, as Dick thinks, you should have been there long ago.’

“ Whereupon she wept and called me masterful.

“ ‘ Isn't it bad enough to have our own troubles, without piling this Engadee business on top of them ? I've done all I could ; but the solicitors say it will cost a lot of money to take such a queer case to the courts, for we have only hearsay testimony and absolutely no tangible proofs, and we can't afford a lawsuit at this juncture.’

“ ‘ Mr. Heene will see you through.’

“ ‘ Oh, Nora, consider how contemptible to take other people’s money.’

“ That’s what we are doing now, over this insolvency. I don’t see the difference. They’re all old friends, and they offered. Anyhow, I’m going myself.’

“ The mater wept a bit more and made me vexed.

“ ‘ I say, mater, you weren’t one of the weeping brigade before I left for England.’

“ ‘ You are very unsympathetic, Nora. Those were happy days.’

“ ‘ And these are just as happy if you’ll let them. Mother, dear, you are spoiling your good looks.’

“ She walked out of the room in a huff, drying her eyes. I knew I had won. Next day I set off, doing as much as I could by train, then buggy, until I got a horse to my mind. The swamp track was impassable, and I was forced to skirt round another six miles.

“ The old couple who look after Engadee have evidently been cautioned, as I could get nothing out of them. The woman tried to accompany me through the rooms, but this I stopped by a glare in my eye that never fails in effect. She listened while I was sauntering about, so I made as much noise as possible, opening and shutting windows, cupboards, doors. Perhaps I made too much, and frightened the ghost, for there were no manifestations above the ordinary, unless you call this one :

“ In due time I reached the stair landing where the square oak pillar completes the banisters. I tried hard to screw off the round top, as you described to me, but it wouldn’t move. I either hadn’t grip enough to turn it or it wasn’t meant to turn. In trying to ease it, I struck the wood once or twice, not heavily, as I didn’t want the old girl below on this particular scent. Here is where the supernatural comes in, if it be such. *I distinctly heard something rustle and settle inside !*

“ It was the merest sound, but I am sure it was no

imagination on my part. Perhaps the blow I gave affected the position of the contents if there were any, and they settled imperceptibly. I stood wondering what to do, but no idea came. If I sought assistance it would give the whole thing away ; if there are documents hidden, you may be sure it is because their existence is unknown. So I left it and departed.

“ There’s a lovely bit of road along the creek—I wonder did you see it?—with Australian gums and English oaks and elms, all trying to intermingle their bare branches in some sort of friendship, an *entente cordiale* of the coming spring. August is the month when the gorse flames yellow, and in September the creek will be just a track of golden wattle blossom, a spot to love and cherish with memories of my English spinney and Saint Sylva’s Pool. Some day I may tell you of Saint Sylva’s Pool and what I saw there.

“ Oh, Dick, my dear absent one, I did wish you could have been with me on the road by the creek. I wanted a long, long talk.

“ As for the general effect of the acres in or under cultivation, they reminded me of the English amateur who went in for farming and got mixed over the seasons, our seasons and theirs I mean. He imagined an early spring, hurried on agricultural operations and hustled nature with a new broom so that he could have a spell off on the spree. Engadee has been worked on the same principle. Small wonder the ghost walks in sheer disapproval. The place looks as if every soul responsible for its well-being had gone off on the spree. . . .”

CHAPTER FIFTY-THREE

Truth has a large wardrobe and her garments are not all white.

THERE was some excuse for the lethargy Mrs. Ireton showed over the Engadee estate. Her solicitors frankly confessed themselves blocked by such scanty information as they could glean.

Whatever papers, deeds and documents belonged to Tom Diss were carefully examined without the least result. No clue of any kind transpired. Amongst the letters and papers Mrs. Ireton had destroyed on her first husband's death she remembered nothing that suggested a partnership, although she was aware that he had been connected with a mine that fizzled out. This was before they were married. Experiences of the kind were common enough and did not excite comment. Diss was too easy-going to trouble. It was only by the persistence of his solicitor that he made a will.

Inquiries showed that the company who were now working "The Leather Pocket" held a clear title. They had taken the mine over from Stephen Merch fifteen years before. He represented himself sole owner. The name of another partner, Thomas Diss, appeared on the original scrip; but Diss was dead. Merch said they had dissolved partnership when the mine under its first name, "The Glory Hole," proved a failure, ten years previous to the sale effected. Merch's books were in complete order and bore legal scrutiny. The price paid was £50,000.

Mrs. Ireton's solicitors searched Government books and private records without finding proof of this dissolution of partnership. They had recourse to advertisement.

This unearthed a miner who had worked in "The Glory Hole." He remembered the time it was given up. The partners, Merch and Diss, always seemed very good friends. It was not a case of partnership dissolved, but of shutting up the mine. It was through his advice that the mine had been kept going so long. He knew there was luck somewhere, though they could not strike it. When finally the mine was shut down, he said to Tom Diss: "Mark my words, a fortin for somebody's locked up there!" "Not for me!" replied Diss. "Well, boss, if I was you I'd hang on to the old thing with my eyebrows." "I'll neither hang on nor hang off," Diss had answered with a laugh. "As long as I live that bit of ground belongs to me and Merch. But as not a soul will give us a red cent for it, we'll not spend a red cent on it."

Some years later the same miner met Merch and they talked of the discarded mine.

"Lots of mines pay arter they're given up, same as if they went to sleep and woke up refreshed. Why don't you and Diss have another go at it?" "Diss is dead," said Merch. "Well," advised the old miner, "get his ghost to give you a shove along. The luck's there."

His words came true.

Stephen Merch's history was gone into without revealing trace of fraud.

The curious circumstance of a Victorian homestead being reproduced from a sketch of an old English house brought the architect to light, Charles Graham. He was a lad in those days with a turn for architectural work, and Merch asked his advice and help. Between them Engadee was planned. Merch said it was the English home of his family, and he wanted it perpetuated in

Australia ; further, that he had been to England not long before to have a look at the old place.

A tremendous amount of money was wasted on the building, as Merch kept adding or altering details, yet he never seemed put out over the expenditure. The building became his hobby. People said Merch made a lucky dip with "The Leather Pocket," and it was a pity Tom Diss died before he could get his money back. As this name appeared on the sketch the young architect felt curious to ask questions of Merch himself.

"My partner before we closed down. He died soon afterwards."

"Hard luck not to get a bit back after spending so much," Graham had remarked, but Merch remained silent. Presently he turned the conversation into another channel.

The gossip of "Camper's Well" disclosed nothing at all. The medical man who had set it going told his tale again quite willingly, concerning the continual deathbed request, "You'll keep your promise, Loo!" Lawyers do not attach much faith to statements of this kind. It is not valid evidence. It may mean anything. As for supernatural manifestations, they do not come into court at all. The law does not deal in such matters.

Mrs. Ireton's solicitors next dived into Government files of a quarter of a century back. While thus engaged they opened communication with Torridge. It was through the Mayor of Locker Gully that the most important information was discovered. He supplied names and particulars of men with whom he had come in contact, all more or less connected with mining operations of the period.

The solicitors began to feel a little more hopeful.

The closing of the mine had led to disputes, generally

disposed of satisfactorily as time wore on, but one foreshadowed a lawsuit.

A man named Murchison brought a claim against the partners ; though Diss would have settled it amicably, Merch refused. Finding the law against him he haggled and delayed until Murchison determined to get his own, and sought out Diss for testimony in black and white, and over his signature, that the claim was just ; that as partner of Stephen Merch in " The Glory Hole " he advised that the amount be paid jointly by them.

Diss gave the required document, and to avoid any more bother paid his share. Murchison never saw him again, for a few days later Diss was taken ill and died of pneumonia.

Merch, confronted with the document and the certainty of a lawsuit, was forced to give way.

This document Murchison now produced, dealing with a few pounds at the most ; yet thousands hung on it, for it was conclusive proof that Merch and Diss were partners immediately up to the time Diss died.

Even with this evidence in hand the task of recovering Engadee seemed as remote as ever.

The ostensible owner, Looena Merch, could not be located ; the agents were ignorant of her whereabouts, and honestly anxious to straighten out the affair.

Dick Heene's offer of £3,000 had been refused months before, and the reason was what he suspected. The agents would have accepted it, but Mrs. Merch refused.

The widow instituted the usual formula on her husband's death, and promptly raised a mortgage on the estate. The agents were the mortgagees, advancing £3,000.

They now wished to notify her that she must come to a settlement, but the elusive widow gave no heed to cables or any other means of communication.

There was no reason to doubt the validity of the will left by Merch. It bore his signature and was attested

by two witnesses. But with these new developments the solicitors included the will in their scrutiny. The signature was identical with existing cheques and other papers, but the witnesses were not forthcoming. This was no proof of forgery. It was suspicious only because of its relation to other circumstances.

Such was the gist of the information Nora conveyed to Dick in her letters.

"It's a deadlock," she added.

Dick held to his view that as so much had been discovered the rest would also be made clear.

CHAPTER FIFTY-FOUR

There are two ways of dealing a knockdown blow. That with the tongue is sometimes more effective than that with the fist.

DICK persuaded his father to go down to Southshire to see the home of the Heenes. Though he expected contemptuous reference to ancestors and such like, the roguery of dead and gone Heenes escaped comment for once. Raban was more interested in the system of cultivating the ground and the ensuing profit and loss to the holder.

Mr. Johnson, the owner of Engledree, scented a possible purchaser in the keen-eyed Australian, and voluntarily mentioned the sum for which he would sell the place—twice as much as he gave ; but there was no response.

The elder Heene held no illusions about his ancestors ; the younger representative of the race was only occupied with the home he meant to build under the Southern Cross, or perhaps the home that already stood waiting, once its name and fair fame were cleared.

One spot Raban was especially anxious to see, a curious structure known as "Heene's Hold," concerning which local information was now silent. Even the guide books ignored it, possibly lacking an explanation. Yet it was a landmark some distance from Engledree ; a proof of the former extent of the estate.

"My old father used to talk of it," said Raban. "Once he and some other lads slept all night there to

see if it were haunted ; likely as not they made a racket fit to scare away a regiment of ghosts. He said one of the Heenes built it for safety or a storehouse in case of war, much as they built the Martello towers later."

"Heene's Hold" looked the epitome of a madman's folly. From afar it stood out against the skyline with quite picturesque effect. There its interest ended, for on a closer view it was a disappointment.

After an ever-widening tramp across brooks and fences and fields, during which it continually came nearer and as continually receded, dodging round another curve in the road, or over a field, as if bent on eluding the observer, it suddenly gave up the game and reared itself stationary, a squat stone edifice amongst a rubble of fragments and broken cement.

Though the doors had long ago vanished, possibly carried off for firewood, as were the window frames, it was easy to scramble in. "Heene's Hold" consisted of two stories and a round tower of three low floors. There was no appearance of stairs ; seemingly no communication between one floor and another, unless achieved from the outside.

The two lower stories were large and circular, with fireplaces facing each other, and with niches in the walls as if for statues ; but the tower rooms were little bigger than cupboards. Every room had an aperture, evidently intended as a window, and well-formed arches were a feature of the ground walls.

The surprise lay in the excellence of the building, just as strongly and securely achieved as a mediæval castle. The cost of dragging stone such a distance in times when roads were ill-made must have been considerable.

"I'd like to have a glimpse of the mind that wasted all that money," mused Raban. "What a queer crowd they must have been. Thank God ! I am Australian born !"

The scene held another attestation of wasted effort

in a revolving apparatus, which was to whirl advertisements windmill fashion continuously on its wings. But it either revolved too quickly or not at all. One time the advertisements would be in such rapid rotation as to be indistinguishable ; another, the wings flapped and remained stationary, so that one advertisement only got the benefit. This apparatus was really the lion of the locality, because of the lawsuits it had fostered. The inventor who had hoped to realize a fortune through a new idea ended in bankruptcy ; the disgusted advertisers wrangled in the courts ; so that the structure was a gigantic *memento mori*, and in such a wrecked condition that it only wanted some public-spirited resident to pull it down. None was forthcoming, as this might arouse some legal lynx and lead to further trouble. The storm-buffed frame whirled and shrieked and flapped until the spot gained the reputation of being haunted.

“ What on earth sort of parish bodies do they have here ? ” commented the Australian in wonder. He felt greater pride than ever in the sun-kissed south.

The visit resulted in some curious happenings. The Heenes were to spend the week-end with Sir Samuel Gisbon at Dipple Dale, but Dick, hearing Lord Groundage was likely to be of the party, returned to London. Raban preferred to remain.

“ I want to see this young feller. I’ve a word² or two to say that may surprise him.”

“ What ? ”

“ Oh, you go back to London and write your love-letter to Nora. It just happens that I’ve been waiting for this opportunity and I don’t mean to lose it.”

Dick tried further questioning ; his father only chuckled and seemed pleased at the turn affairs were taking. Sir Samuel and he were old cronies, not always seeing eye to eye, yet upholding the best traditions of

the land they both loved, the traditions carried across the seas by Englishmen and planted at the foot of every Union Jack that waved.

Sir Samuel was still groaning over his wife's reluctance to leave England ; his old bones were wearying more than ever for the fire of the southern sun.

Raban Heene centred his interest on the former aide-de-camp. Lord Groundage lacked sufficient money to permit him to indulge in sneers at his vice-regal employer, but he made a fetish of Australia, like most people who have been unsuccessful there ; he never allowed a chance to slip of administering pinpricks. The talk once settled on Nora Diss and her rush home. This stimulated his sarcasm. Though most of the listeners took no notice, one man turned in expostulation, the Reverend Cadwallader Tratt, a fiery little Welshman. He cherished a secret admiration for the stately lady from the land of the Southern Cross, who reminded him of his ancient princesses of Gwalia, and he would hear no ill of her. That Lord Groundage was the patron of his living troubled him but little. Several ill-deeds and ill-doings led to an attitude of resentment against a titled scamp ; the sneer at Nora was the finishing touch.

" My lord, I think your words are an insult to a beautiful and pure-souled girl ; they merit the censure of any decent-minded man."

" Go to blazes ! " cried the lordling. " A d——d parson setting *me* in order ! "

" A parson is the right one to do it, seeing that nobody else cares, or perhaps they do not rate you of sufficient importance to notice."

" Gad ! Fellow ! Are you mad ? Do you know I can turn you out neck and crop ? "

The little Welshman beamed.

" I'm very sure you can, my lord ; it's just the line of action you would like."

" Then shut up ! "

"I will not. I repeat that your words are degrading in the mouth of a boor, let alone a peer."

"Then I'll say them again." He added some epithet that sent the blood flaming to the fiery Welsh head.

"If nothing else will stop you, take that!" He administered a knockdown blow that sent Lord Groundage sprawling in fury, and unable to regain his balance for the moment.

"I'll—I'll—I'll——" he spluttered.

"No, you'll not," said the Welshman. "I'll do it myself. I'll resign my living and my congregation shall know why. They are quite aware of your scandalous life already. I am a man before I am a priest, and I thank God for it!"

Lord Groundage scrambled up black with rage, and advanced on his foe, but the nimble-footed Welshman skipped aside. By his own impetus the man of title went down for a second time, toppling into the pond this time.

The guests had gathered round in amazed protest, everybody ejaculating. Sir Samuel came over the lawn as quickly as his heavily encumbered old bones permitted.

Before he could utter a word Lord Groundage was helped to his feet by a little grey wisp of a man with keen eyes that shone brilliantly.

"I'm glad my son did not hear you, my lord, or you would not have got out of this alive. My name is Heene; perhaps it is already familiar to you."

Lord Groundage made an effort to extricate himself from the thin arm that was hooked into his, but the thin arm was like an iron wire, and there was a sharp pain in his leg. His brain was still nimble enough to be offensive.

"Heene? Probably you're his father; you know best. I don't suppose the fellow ever had a grandfather."

"That's just the point that will interest you, my

good young man, and something I've been wanting to let you know. Who my boy's grandfather was? Well, let's begin with his grandmother. Ladies first. His grandmother was a little white English blossom who came out to the goldfields in '51, the wife of one Humphrey Lath, the *Honourable* Humphrey Lath, to be precise. Your lordship has heard the name, and the marriage is in *Burke's Peerage*. He died, the little white woman's husband, a wastrel in one sense; but he had a heart, and it was a heart that caused his death, for it broke at the thought of the hard lot he had brought that slip of a girl to. My old dad, Richard Heene, helped him all he knew; he saw to him as he lay dying, and gave him a solemn promise that took away the terrors of death. 'Heene,' he said, 'see that my dear wife is all right.' My good old dad said, 'Don't fret, lad. I'll see that she comes to no harm, 'fore God, believe me!' So the Honourable Humphrey Lath, who would have been a lord had he lived, trekked to the New Jerusalem. Being the last of his race, he made space for the next male, and that's how *your* father came to give *you* a title. My good old dad married the little white widow, and that's who my boy's grandmother was. She might have been Lady Groundage, only she did not bear children to the Lath line, thank God! Her baby, the Honourable Humphrey's son, was born dead. But *I* was born alive. If you want to see the picture of my mother, and my boy's grandmother, the woman who would have been Lady Groundage had her first husband lived, but for the grace of God, there it is, a little medallion in marble, my dear little mother, a wee white blossom of the English snow."

A gasp broke from the bystanders. Raban Heene drew his arm away. Such was the effect of moral triumph that the little grey wisp of a man became ennobled, and the nobleman shrank to insignificance.

"Lord Groundage!" struck in Sir Samuel's bluff voice, "I apologize to my guests for asking them to

associate with a blackguard. Kindly clear out of my house."

Raban Heene felt his arm touched, and turned to see the fiery little Welsh minister quivering with eager resolve.

"Mr. Heene," he burst out, "is there room in your country for a parson of independent views but sound theology who could run his own church without *this*?"

"Yes, oceans of room, room for thousands, if you believe what you're talking about. We don't want the sanctimonious snivel and drawl. We've got 'em already—by the ton!"

CHAPTER FIFTY-FIVE

I love the word "impossible" ; it is my steering wheel.

MR. BAGWELL KING, the English factor, did not know what to make of Raban Heene. The Australian was a combination new to him. Shrewdness, perspicuity, fair dealing, governed by a will of iron, are common attributes in a business man. Raban was something more, a dominant personality that impressed itself on the very air.

The two men got on well enough as far as small civilities carried them. King, while rating himself highly as an autocrat, had the sense to tone down the tendency of his class to pomposity. The trip to the Antipodes rubbed off many insular angles. He showed considerable courtesy to the new arrival ; in his heart he meant to impress him, but the head of Heene Limited did not lack social recognition, and nothing impressed him in English life save the universal slowness in business.

Bagwell King was keenly desirous of inducing the Australian to fall in with certain views regarding the fibre. One of these was to get in, as he phrased it, with a big German firm, Bachler & Co., remarkable for the largeness of their orders and the low price offered. Heene steadily refused.

"Let them pay the full rate," he said. "Why should we reduce to them and not to France?"

"Because they have a hundred branches in Europe. Think of the tremendous opening for the fibre."

"I don't care if they have a thousand. The offer must show the necessary margin of profit, otherwise it is no good."

"If you cut down ex's at your end you could make the profit."

"I prefer my own method. Your standpoint is different from mine. You people who do the go-betweening crush the manufacturer by preventing him from advertising in certain trade journals, British as well as overseas and foreign. The small men cave in, afraid. Only the braver spirits dare break through the hedge of habit and learn for themselves how to build up a new market."

"Tush! It is we 'go-betweens,' as you call us, who build up a new market for them."

"Nothing of the sort. Your method is to keep buyer and seller separate, unknown to each other, as far apart as if they had leprosy. Yet there should be a decent intention of each to do the best he can for the other. Do you encourage *that*?"

"Oh, come, come!" Though Bagwell King laughed, he felt piqued at the other's tone.

"A buyer should know the original source of a product to make sure he is getting the thing he pays for. In ninety-nine cases out of a hundred he does not. Nor does he understand the question of first-hand cost, intermediary profit, and selling expense, least of all why he pays the price agreed on."

"Naturally. All that he relegates to men of known integrity. It saves him a tremendous lot of useless trouble."

"That's it. You've said it. He must be saved trouble at any cost. The British manufacturer makes something new, something good, and he doesn't give a twopenny damn what becomes of it."

"You're utterly wrong."

"Prove I'm wrong, then. The British manufacturer has no enterprise to push his product, only interest

enough to introduce it in a more or less haphazard fashion abroad. He fixes up an agency by correspondence and expects the poor devil of a local man to develop the sale at his own expense. He should develop that sale himself. Instead of agencies the Britisher should own branches. Comparatively few firms have. Instead of a German firm annexing Europe with its hundred claws, Europe should be keeping up her own end of the stick. A hundred-power German firm is a disgrace to European merchants."

Bagwell King was rather sorry he started the argument. He went off to mature another plan.

"I intend to bring Bachler & Co.'s representative, Mr. Paroll Wise, round and introduce him personally," he wrote, "so that you can hear his statements, and, it may be, reconsider your decision."

"What a trailer he is," laughed Heene. "Hasn't the representative grit enough to come round by himself without being introduced? Why is King so keen on it?"

Edward Burston was in the office at the time. He was a trusted friend of both father and son, and knew all that went on. They found him a fund of information concerning the commerce of large cities abroad.

"Don't you go," said Heene. "I've an idea there's something behind this introducing. I should like you to be present."

"Wherever I've been on the Continent," said Burston, "German merchants have wedged their way in. This Bachler started as a salesman, then opened a small shop. Now he's a millionaire. When they've exhausted Europe they'll go elsewhere. This mail brought a letter from South America. Bachler is feeling his way there. Germany gets her goods in stealthily. At first you don't see the goods. She comes along like a cuttlefish that throws off a cloud of obscurity

to prevent its movements being seen. Nobody notices what's going on, they're too dense, not only the English, —French, Italians, Russians, are all alike—blind to Germany's way, until they wake up to find their trade being sneaked away from them. It isn't as if Germans were popular. They are not. Yet they get in, and stay in."

"Well, now I'm up against it; but I'm d——d if they'll shift me."

When Bagwell King arrived with the representative of the one-hundred branch German firm the air of the office became taut with expectancy. Three personalities were meeting, instinctively on guard. Burston, an apparent nonentity, sat silently writing. One glance at the group suggested strategy. He likened them to the three fates, wondering who was the spinner, the measurer and the cutter, and whether the devil was at hand to manipulate the material. It was odd the subject of their discussion, a cotton fibre, should be so suitable for weaving.

They were in curious contrast. King, the factor, of large physique, inexpressive face and dark hair, not entirely innocent of extraneous aid; Paroll Wise, slim, ruminative, English-looking; the little alert Australian of five foot four, with eyes that saw through most things and a brain that worked like a flash of lightning.

None of them emphasized his nationality. The German was more English than the Englishman, save that he occasionally fell into tricks of American accent.

"Mr. Wise will give you a concise account of his firm's aims and achievements," said the factor in a suave voice, the more formal introduction over. "I am sure you will accord him every attention."

"I have already given Mr. Wise attention. The only question of moment is has he anything more to say in addition to what his letters set forth?"

Therewith sounded the note of battle.

"Good old Raban!" thought Burston, over his writing. "He's thrown down the gage."

A momentary contraction of the brows flickered on King's face; he did not like this bellicose beginning. The German representative smiled slightly.

"I purpose going into detail, Mr. Heene, if you will allow me. One can scarcely do this in a letter. As you are already aware our firm has a hundred branches in Europe alone." Wise gave this statement impressively. It never failed. It was like an axe to clear a path in the forest.

"I'll give you an hour with pleasure; two if you think it necessary. But to what purpose? You've already had my answer several times. I am not in the least likely to change."

"But when you hear the——"

"If your intention is to persuade me to reconsider my decision and accept your offer, you can spare yourself the trouble. I repeat I will not abate one fraction of the price already quoted. Why should I?"

Wise was nonplussed. He returned to the axe.

"We are the largest German firm in the world. We have a hundred branches in Europe alone."

"So you have said in your letters."

"Therefore it would be to your interest to stand in with such an important organization."

"I don't want to stand in; I want to stand out. I object to German methods; I refuse German prices. That sums up my point of view."

Wise's smooth forehead quivered slightly and his eyes moved away from the small, shrewd face of the Australian.

Burston remained at his desk writing, without offering a word. It was not his province. The fight was between these two only. Yet he could not help wondering at the antagonistic atmosphere that had suddenly

developed in the quiet office, as if the two striving human personalities had infected the air.

"We are prepared to embark on a venture of our own initiative."

"Why not do it, then, since you are—prepared?"

"With our firm's wealth and influence what's to prevent them starting on the fibre themselves and becoming your rival?"

"Yes, what *is* to prevent them? That's the question I'm asking myself. You know what we've been doing; you've been supplied with information; you've found out all you wanted to find out. You're not exactly babes in arms. Then why hasn't your firm got to work already? Why keep on pestering me with an offer I refuse as unprofitable? What's behind it all? What's the game?"

"The desire of German merchants to extend commerce. That's the game. A firm that has a hundred branches in Europe alone can be said to understand commerce, surely."

"They understand the trick of absorbing other men's business. They have become a hundred-power firm because they undercut and cheapen and push out. I've expressed myself to this effect in my last letter, so that if my language appears strong it is because I feel strongly."

Bagwell King moved uneasily. He was on the point of entering the dispute, but tact kept his tongue quiet. The head of Heene Limited was not the type of man to allow intrusion in his affairs. The factor was a large shareholder, not a director. Controlling interest he had none. Yet he longed for power. The marine fibre was looming up now as a come-to-stay product on the English market; he wanted to be among the foremost. It would suit him very well to be the English representative of the Australian firm. He was quietly working to that end. If he interfered in this altercation it might develop a quarrel with Raban Heene, the very

thing he wished most to avoid. Diplomacy pointed a way out.

"I'll leave you to discuss the matter together," he said, rising. "You would be better alone."

Burston gave no sign of seeing or hearing as King left the office.

Torrige put his head in the door. He was a privileged visitor and never knocked. The sight of the two faces and the sound of the voices caused him to withdraw as hastily as he appeared. Before retreating to the outer office he threw a second glance at Wise.

"They're at it red-hot," he remarked to the clerk. Then more to himself—"Who the dickens *is* that fellow? This is the fifth time I've run up against him."

"Mr. Paroll Wise," answered the clerk, thinking the question intended for him.

"Yes, I know he's Wise. I want to find out what makes him—Wise? He's wise about many things, too jolly wise."

The clerk laughed at his witticism, but Torrige stood in a brown study, with his gaze on the wall.

Wise found he could make no headway against Heene's attitude.

"Do I take it you refuse to go into the matter?" he said stiffly.

"That's about the size of it. Your firm must pay fair prices and understand other folk want profit as well as themselves."

"Then there seems no use in my remaining."

"There was no use in your coming. You already had my answer, an emphatic answer to your last letter. If you imagined this threat of starting as a rival would influence me you are mistaken. On the contrary, I invite you to—come and do it."

"That is our intention. You'll regret your refusal. Good morning."

TorrIDGE watched the departure before he re-entered. Dick Heene came in at the same moment.

"Say, boss, don't think I'm here to quiz into your affairs. I heard some of the argument, and it didn't strike me as if you were over keen on that Johnnie."

"I'm not. For him personally I don't care one way or the other, but his firm's a nuisance."

TorrIDGE hesitated, evidently weighing his words.

"Are you sure it's not the man who's the nuisance?"

"Of course he shares the reputation of those who employ him."

"No; that's not my meaning. I suppose there is such a firm as he represents?"

"Very much a firm. They boast a one-hundred grab of Europe alone."

"Then they have queer means of doing things, or employ queer men. My belief is that chap is just turned off to nose round."

"What have you heard of him?"

"Nothing. I'd like to hear more, for I'd take my davy he's not straight. This is the fifth time I've run up against that feller. First in the Lord Mayor's Court, listening like any lamb. I was there to hear a case. Then a while back I was down at Portsmouth to watch a bit of gun practice. He was there too. I thought he belonged to a newspaper, as he seemed to be taking notes. Well, last Friday I had to be in Liverpool to see a friend off. I'm blest if he wasn't watching *me*! I watched him back then, and he quit. Then again, here. That's four times. Wait a bit. The fifth's the funniest. It's the queer part. I've a lady friend—or rather the missis has—who wants her family fixed up a bit now she's rich, and I recommended our friend Josh—you remember Josh, the pedigree joker? So I dropped a line to Bond Street where he hangs out, and he made an appointment—oh, quite a dandy. Who should be with him but this very man! Wise he calls himself——"

"Yes. Quite right. Wise—Paroll Wise."

“ ‘ I’m glad to see you,’ says Josh politely, thinking, of course, I was there to do business on my own account. ‘ Oh, I haven’t come about my own corpses,’ I said, ‘ but about a lady friend’s.’ Wise seemed to take considerable interest in this, so I put on the pot a bit. ‘ Nuisance to have too much of a family when the beginning’s missing and the end of it all over the place.’ Josh looked at the other chap straight in the eye. ‘ I’m sorry I can’t ask you to stay, Mr. Wise,’ he said, ‘ but I have business to settle.’ So up Wise gets and goes—not too quickly either. ‘ Is he a friend of yours?’ I asked Josh. Josh turned mysterious. ‘ I don’t even know who the feller is. He was on the *Soleil* from Naples to Marseilles, asking questions and dodging all over the boat. He tried to pump me—*me!* I took him for a private detective, only I saw him in conversation with a friend of mine, a lady of title——’ ”

“ A lady of title!” exclaimed Dick. “ Did he mention her name?”

“ Yes. You know it. Lady Rose Allway.”

“ I see it. He’s been getting her on a string, probably Falcott & Co. That’s the threat of starting in rivalry. Perhaps they’ve bluffed him, and he’s come here. They must want to get in pretty badly to come pestering like this.”

“ That’s the German way,” said Burston.

“ Then the German way is a crooked way,” summed up the Mayor of Locker Gully. “ For that chap’s a spy!”

“ Right,” said Raban. “ I felt there was something behind it all.”

While they stood thus discussing, Bagwell King returned. He looked put out.

“ I would like a word with you alone,” he began, with a comprehensive glance at the group.

“ If it’s about Mr. Paroll Wise there’s no need to be alone. If you can vouch for his credibility it’s more than he can for himself.”

“ He’s the accredited agent of an influential German

firm, and I am sorry you showed him such scant courtesy."

"Then you shouldn't have brought him when you were already aware of my views. He wants to grab the whole show. What's this sudden interest in the fibre?"

"You don't suppose it's a harmful interest, do you?"

"I'll swear it isn't honest."

"I tell you it's legitimate commerce to buy a product as low as possible."

"And I tell you it is dishonest to force down the price. I've developed my own system and it's brought me here to London, not as an agency but as a branch office, with headquarters in three Australian capitals, and soon to be in many more. It's been done by fair dealing. The wage-earner in every grade in my employ has been given the reward of his work without scraping or niggling or haggling. Now you come, a stranger, merely because you are a shareholder, with suggestions about cutting this and dropping that. I'm not taking any. It is methods like this that are ruining English trade and letting Germany in. You tried to juggle with the market and failed because I saw through your move. You bring this spy here and do all you can to help him divert English trade. Either you're his tool and blind to what's happening, or you have some ulterior end in view. That's *your* affair. I see for myself. You may be ignorant of his movements, but I know that he's been intriguing with others to get a footing in Australia. Not if I can stop him. If the result of my life is to be a lickspittle to a gang of German grabbers it's time I went under."

"Then all I can say is if you don't change your views, and that pretty soon, you'll find it utterly impossible to widen your trade."

The head of Heene Limited looked the English factor keenly in the eyes and his incisive utterance grew a shade more intense.

“ I heard the word ‘ impossible ’ when I started to work the fibre. I wish I had a pound for every time it’s been spoken since. Now the fibre is safely launched in one hundred English manufacturing houses and taken up by a thousand firms. I love the word ‘ impossible.’ It is MY STEERING WHEEL ! ”

CHAPTER FIFTY-SIX

The world holds many jewels ; the brightest are
human.

THEN came the thunderclap of war. Though the fibre was safely established on the London market, it suffered like every other business. The sales were severely shaken ; weeks of progress negatived ; the scaffolding shivered. Yet the head of Heene Limited showed no impatience. There was nothing for it but to hold on determinedly and to keep on working. When rosy Hope has a fainting fit and loses her colour this is the surest way of reviving her.

It was now that Edward Burston proved himself strong. The successful issue to the mercerizing process left him free for other duties. He lost no time in utilizing his American experience and adding New York buyers to the list.

To develop this opening a visit to the United States was clearly necessary. Who should go ? Raban Heene shrewdly saw that Burston would be an efficient English representative ; it was little use expecting much from the Continental agents just now.

With his usual longheadedness Raban also knew that when the first welter was over and the fighting nations settled into their stride there was a tremendous future before the fibre. For army requirements, as well as those of the navy, there was no rival against it for durability.

“ Owing to the inability of Germany to procure hemp

and flax from Russia and Italy, cotton must become a substitute in military equipment. Tents, tarpaulins, aeroplane canvas, nosebags, kitbags, motor hoods and a score of kindred articles will now have to be made from cotton. Where's the cotton to come from? The French Government prohibited the export of cotton of any description on the outbreak of the war. Merchants protested they were ruined; but the Government promised to buy the whole of their output. Since wool is denied to Germany she must clothe her troops with cotton. This she foresaw. Hence the grab at the fibre."

"But why couldn't the Germans get in on their own long ago?" said Burston. "There are thousands of them in Australia."

"Possibly nobody knew till too late. Look how slow we were ourselves in getting the fibre taken up. As a matter of fact several influential Germans were approached over the affair, but they saw nothing in it because of the tremendous expense. Still, now that they are alive to it they're up to putting a dummy in, English name and English-speaking; get a bit of fibre-covered coast and 'salt' it with seemingly English workmen. Mark my words, they'll try their durnedest to find a substitute for cotton. It's either cotton or collapse with them."

"Germany long ago discovered the value of the short fibre in the States," said Burston. "'Linters' it is called, and enormous quantities were exported in the ordinary way, also a great deal of cotton waste. Nobody knew why. To-day they boast these two materials are more used for explosives than cotton itself. Linters and cotton waste were about a cent a pound; now they are five or six."

"I said there was something behind it; I felt it in my bones. Bachler & Co. did their durnedest and got dished instead. I wouldn't give a tinker's curse for their chances in Australia now."

"You think Bachler wanted to exploit the fibre for the German army?" asked Dick.

"I'm convinced that Bachler is another name for something bigger, and that this war has been in hand for years before they started it. All the more reason for us to be home again to give increased care and watchfulness to the stuff. Likely as not Germany is up to making another try under a new dummy."

Raban yearned to be back in his old headquarters in Melbourne. So did Dick. After due cogitation it was arranged that Dick should go on from Sydney to America, after certain other affairs were brought to a satisfactory issue.

"Perhaps Nora will not mind a trip to Niagara," he said to himself, "instead of the English June. If this horrible war would end we could have both."

He was eager to see her again to hasten on his marriage, whether Engadee turned out good or ill; sometimes the hours dragged until the day of departure. One keen regret he felt in leaving Snuff behind. Quarantine regulations necessitated this. It seemed as if the dog guessed his thoughts, for the little animal would come in front of Dick and rest his sharp nose on the office chair, watching unblinkingly with humid, faithful eyes, as if in mute inquiry.

Miss May, the typist, begged to have the dog; Edward Burston was equally desirous, and Snuff ran from one to the other when his name was mentioned. He liked them both, but this evident plotting about him made him uneasy. Dick was seriously thinking of smuggling the dog through when an incident settled Snuff's future.

Miss May had turned out a jewel. From the usual school smattering of French, she emerged a complete trade guide in less than two months. By way of relaxation she dived into Italian, described as the easiest of all languages to pick up, the hardest to attain perfection in.

Dick saw the advantage of a foreign correspondence clerk and increased her salary.

"If you could only manage Spanish now," he said, "I would double your screw. We'll want it for South America."

"I know a little. Give me four months and I'll be forward enough."

Dick thought she was promising too much, yet in four months she was ready.

Now came trouble. Her prowess got about, and many were the offers to inveigle her away, several of them matrimonial. While taking an obvious delight in her fame, she commenced a coquetry with Russian out of sheer force of habit, and said a smiling "nay" in five languages, ending in a simple assent in no language whatever when Edward Burston proposed.

"You must give us Snuff for our wedding present," suggested both parties to Dick. It really seemed the best way of securing the dog's future.

Nora's next letter dealt with a variety of entertainments she was planning in aid of the war funds.

All the Australian capitals were intent on getting together as solid a donation as possible; everywhere ingenuity and inventive skill found scope. Though Nora Diss was one of many, her ideas took pride of place.

"This cruel war that has come up so suddenly has set Australian women afire to help in every imaginable way. As Little Noah's Ark Limited holds a name already for charity, I mean to raise money that way for soldiers' comforts. A friend has offered me her grounds to give an entertainment in Melbourne. The only trouble will be to get the animals used to strange surroundings.

"I've already sold several of the frocks I brought home and given the proceeds to the fund. The Customs let me off lightly, and I have sold the things for double

what they cost me because of the makers' names. I must have been mad to squander so much money, for I never could wear half what I bought, especially with dad's smash in everybody's mouth. A lot of rubbish is talked about English makers and all that. We have dressmakers in Melbourne and Sydney who can give a few points to any of them."

The transportation of Little Noah's Ark Limited to Melbourne from The Launching Place was managed in a motor, Nora sitting amongst her pets and the animals quite contented and amenable. The velvet-nosed pony was the only performer who did the journey on foot by easy stages.

There was a little difficulty at first, as they found themselves in new surroundings, necessitating each animal to be put on a lead for awhile, and given its favourite dainty. The nervousness wore off, and all went well. Nora was able to direct a series of performances. She was requisitioned and cajoled on every side; other girls started to train pets and unusual performers; they came to Nora for advice. Thus she found work in which her soul delighted in developing new ideas or remodelling what was old.

A particular success was "The Wheel of Fortune," a large roulette wheel in flowers, which in revolving flung pellets to the circle standing around. These numbers indicated prizes or blanks in a vast bran pie some ten feet square, marked in twenty sections to correspond with the numbers on the pellets.

There was also a battle of paper flowers, discharged from popguns; marionettes arranged as puff billiards, and a "Follow-my-Leader" who dropped secret clues that baffled all but the keenest in pursuit.

The ever-popular game of chess with living figures was improved upon by introducing characters from fairy tales, and most charming of all was a huge sundial with twelve sections for the hours defined in green

hedges. Instead of the hours there formed in each section the flower peculiar to each month of the Australian year, actually appearing to grow out of the ground and attain gigantic size. By night this was done by electric light.

A moonlight water-picnic suggested no novelty in itself; with Nora's inventive brain the idea leapt to romance, and every hostess near a creek or a river or an available sea front rang the changes indefatigably.

A string of floats, all tiny white lights, bobbed up and down the rippling waters, a track to guide boats to the spot chosen for the picnic. As each boat arrived at the rendezvous it hoisted a different light, and a corresponding rocket shot upwards, so that the colours of the rainbow converged to illuminate the gathering.

This was varied among the watering-places on the coast by having the supper spread on a star-shaped raft, so as to allow the boats to nose into an angle and fling outwards star-fashion, while Little Boy Blue, Dick Whittington, and other heroes stood on the raft in welcome, and to hand about the viands.

The proceeds of these various diversions augmented the war fund considerably. As everybody was enjoying the work and spending money freely over the preparations, trade reaped the benefit at a time when the outlook was bad, owing to a succession of rainless seasons.

CHAPTER FIFTY-SEVEN

The treasures of Earth are toll to the devices of
Death.

THE Heenes and the Torridges were again shipmates facing south ; once more the smoking saloon took delight in the Mayor of Locker Gully and his philosophy.

But it was not the jovial time of the first voyage ; the war-cloud hung over the world and men were anxious to be in their own country. Torridge declared his intention of attaching himself to the Australian troops directly he landed, and half the boat joined issue.

They even started deck drill ; it helped to shake off gloomy forebodings. This was where a strong, cheerful spirit like Torridge became a king among men, as his type has been from the beginning. Nobody now gave a thought to his origin or his occupation. From one end of the boat to the other he was regarded as a rock of common sense and good humour ; in a minor degree his wife shared the same verdict. Some of the fine ladies who ignored her once turned to her in this dark hour out of weary longing for the sound of a cheery voice. For there were croakers on board who steadily prophesied a bankrupt Australia, a broken commercial community, a ruined agriculture. To whom Torridge gave a scathing reproof :

" Then, by Gad, you'll help to bring it about. Drop it ; if you can't say anything good, don't try to upset other people. Stop your rotten blithering."

Dick Heene was anxious to join the contingent on arrival, but a stronger duty called him. His father was not able to keep at the head of affairs single-handed, and looked to him for help. A long pay-roll must be maintained if the business was to be kept up to its rate of progress before the war ; workers must be worked with ; their wives and families watched ; the various staffs manned as usual, to allow for those enlisting ; there must be no shortening of hands, hours, or responsibilities. The machinery could not stop. If it did, the loss was to the country as well as to the firm. Patriotism is not always covered by the glory of the Union Jack. It can look very grey at times, with a promise of turning to drab. Yet behind the grey and the drab is—honour.

Dick was compelled to curb his military zeal for a time. Later on, when his place could be filled, he, too, would join the colours.

“ Supposing I have a good idea from a public-spirited point of view,” said Torridge, “ who’s the Johnnie I ought to hunt up ? Whose doorbell has to be rung ? Not Proxy House ! I’ve had some already. Most Australians have. But isn’t there a top-notchier who’ll listen to me without having to take the wool out of his ears ? ”

“ Quite a decent lot if you know where to find them,” replied Dick. “ What’s the dart ? Oh, I am not asking your business ; just give me an inkling of what’s in your mind, then I can explain better.”

“ It concerns you too. About your fibre stuff ; it’s a substitute for cotton, eh ?—and cotton is used to make gun-cotton, a material pretty necessary to the old country just now. Suppose you get hold of another substance to yield picric acid. Picric acid, as you know, is the main constituent in lyddite, turpenite, used in war shells. Harness up picric acid and your marine cotton——”

“ Where’ll you get your picric acid ? ”

" I bet I can put my hands on a little lot, after working it, of course. Listen. You know the 'Yacca?' Something like a palm tree, with a long spiky flower like a lance? "

" Yes. The grass tree from which we get red gum."

" In this red gum or resin is this very same picric acid."

" Why, of course, I forgot that."

" I've done a bit ; perhaps my memory's fresher. There are two kinds of resin, one's bright red or ruby gum, the other's yellow. The red's obtainable all along the southern coast from Cape Otway to Fremantle ; the yellow's in New South Wales and the east coast of Victoria. Yacca or grass tree gum it's called everywhere."

" Its botanical name is *Xanthorrhœa*."

" Nobody's time for that. Yacca is good enough. I've sold some tons of it. We just cut off the leaves close to the stem, then fell the stem and beat it over a sheet till the gum falls out. I made quite a bit over it years back ; but wasn't content with red gum—I must have a go at the yellow."

" And got your fingers bitten? "

" N-no. I came out all right. You shall hear. I was always nosing round for something new and good for a gamble. One day a Jervis Bay man turned up with some of the yellow Yacca gum. He didn't know it. I didn't either, except that I had handled red of the same nature. ' Can you get much of it? ' I asked. ' Tons and tons,' he said. ' Are you on to supply me with ten tons at £10 a ton? ' ' You bet your boots, boss, and make good wages at the game.' So it was settled. He brought me the ten tons and I paid him the £100 without in the least knowing how it would shape. Anyway, I got it off to London to a man I was doing business with at the time. He knew nothing either ; but just shot it on the Public Gum Sales. As luck would have it there was a German agent present who fancied he knew all

about it, as being rich in picric acid, though I didn't find this out till afterwards. He just lay to with his ears back and set off another chump. There they were bucking at one another, bidding like mad, till it was knocked down to the German for £71 per ton, £710 for what cost £120 delivered in London. Of course I thought I was made, and on to something good ; gassed about it no end, and ordered the Jervis Bay chap to bring another ten ton lot at £10 a ton. But the little spec. didn't come off, cos the news of the deal had set another fellow on the job. He was a German, too. In he whipped, spoiled my deal, and collared the swag himself. It was his little lot. The German way. Only instead of ten ton he ordered thirty. He wanted to help himself as well as the Vaterland. Our Jervis Bay friend also made a bit for himself, as he raised the price. Well, off goes the blessed stuff to London and on the Gum Sales as before. But whether the first German found himself nobbled over his plunge, or the stuff didn't come to expectations, or perhaps it was Big Billy who wouldn't buy the bow-wow, Lawd knows ; but there were no bidders that day, and the second lot of yellow Yacca gum was given away for a few quid to some Britisher. So it was lucky I didn't deal. The German Johnnie who sprung my share did the goose-step backwards. How's that for spoiling the Egyptian? "

" Tiptop ! "

" Now why can't you and me put our heads together ? You can get tons of this cotton fibre ; I can get tons of gum. Can't we develop a nice little fiery chip of the Southern Cross that will help to bust up the German bogey and extend Australian resources at the same time ? "

Dick Heene's eyes sparkled.

" I'm on. Let's find a practical chemist. Neither you nor I know anything of——"

" Hi, youngster, don't you be too sure of what I know or don't know. Book learning, precious little ; brain

brushing is another matter. I can make one or two of you sit up."

"I believe you."

"Even Yacca gum and saltpetre make a very decent decoction for the devil. A chap told me when prospecting for gold in Gippsland that he had sunk a shaft 100 ft. deep with Yacca gum and saltpetre mixed, a quarter saltpetre to three-quarters Yacca. It made a slow explosion and shifted a lot of rock. Then he tried half of each and nearly shifted himself, for the bang was so quick he had to be lively to quit the danger zone."

Torrige took out his pocket-book.

"I have facts and figures by the foot. For every hundred pounds of ammunition required for propelling a shell or rifle charge, sixty pounds of cotton is necessary."

"Not for high explosives."

"Don't get mixed up over it. Picric acid cannot be used as a substitute for gun-cotton. It would blow the guns to smithereens. Cotton is not wanted for shells, but for the powder that fires the shell. To fire a big 15-in. gun, a Queen Bess boomer, a whole bale of cotton is used, 400 pounds. Get that into your head. Sixty per cent. of cotton is wanted; the finest cotton, mind, not any old muck."

"Right," laughed Dick. "We can produce as good a cotton from the fibre as need be. But lyddite is beyond us, unless you've something up your sleeve."

"Lyddite is just picric acid melted with a little vaseline."

"I know what picric acid is, a yellow substance used in dyes, and also valuable in the treatment of burns. Besides being an explosive, it is deadly poisonous."

"I've seen it prepared from coal-tar," went on Torrige, "the refuse of gas manufacture. When the carbolic acid is separated and treated from the boiled coal-tar, it is boiled again in strong sulphuric acid. The smell's enough to shift Hades. Then into this pure

nitric acid is carefully poured. The blend is picric acid. Now our friend Yacca gum doesn't need all that bother. It gives you picric acid almost first hand. After the gum is purified and washed with alcohol to dissolve it, nitric acid is added and there's little pickaninny picric."

"Well, what's your idea?"

"To develop the industry, you with your fibre, me and little Yacca, and send home endless supplies of first-class explosive material, prepared, packed, patented, as a present to the war fund, our little present of practical good wishes to the dear old mother country in her hour of need. Gad! It would be great!"

"Let's do it. Our firm will stand a thousand pounds to pay the cost——"

"I'll stand another thou. to provide the picric acid bread and butter. But first the Federal Government will have to stop the Germans from exploiting the grass tree gum. It will interfere with private property, but as their aim is to use the stuff as a weapon of war against England the Commonwealth has every right to interfere. The Germans pretend that they use the gum for bright colours in linoleums and floor cloths, varnishes and dyes. The red Yacca gum brought £7 to £8 a ton in Hamburg to the Australian firm who worked it ten years ago. Since then the trade is quite in the hands of the Germans."

"All trade with the enemy will now be stopped."

"Yes, but if the local firm has a German attached he'll find a way in or try to. I know that from Kangaroo Island alone thousands and thousands of tons have been exported to Germany within the last twenty years. The price rose to £12, £20, £24. 'What's it all going to Germany for?' the boys would ask. Nobody could tell save the tarradiddles about bright colours in floor cloths. For years it was kept a secret. But when £65 a ton was given the truth leaked out. The stuff was going to Germany to help manufacture

high explosives for *this* war. The German way again. They made a grab at Noumea too. It makes you wild to think the brutes have been getting the means to destroy *our* men out of *our* country. Now the boot's going on the other leg. Yacca will yank off the Huns."

CHAPTER FIFTY-EIGHT

The evil that men do lives after them and gives their spirits
ceaseless unrest after death.

THERE is always a tremendous gathering of the clans at the piers when a liner comes and goes, and in this time of calamity the breezy welcome was especially grateful to hearts hungering for news of their dear ones.

The Australian winter was well over, and though furs were still general the returned travellers regarded the season as warm and balmy after the cool English summer.

Nora Diss, with two dogs leaping and frolicking about her, waved a handkerchief to Dick. He sprang forward and caught her in his arms, pushing people aside in his ardour. Nobody minded. Most of the crowd were intent on kissing—not all lovers though; relatives of every degree and class abounded. It was curious to watch the different effects of emotion, for while some were wrought to hysteria, others made trite remarks on personal appearance, or the weather, or the war.

Dick devoured his sweetheart with his eyes, hardly taking in what she was saying in his marvel that her beauty and her stateliness and her fine womanliness were for him and him alone.

Their talk ranged from rhapsody to bathos, after the manner of lovers; the happy little jokes that stamp the speakers as lunatics to a listener; the flashes into deep feeling; the silences that say more than speech.

"What have your people done about Engadee?" was one of the first sane questions he asked her.

"They're hopelessly boxed. Dad's been there with the mater; the solicitors are always seeing somebody and saying something; the agents are always writing letters. Of course the war has unsettled everything and everybody, but I can't understand why they can't make a move one way or another. I think they are stuck up over the question of procedure, or waiting to unearth more witnesses."

"Oh, well, we'll set things humming now."

In his heart he did not feel so sure; there was no trace of Stephen Merch's widow. The Louis d'Or had vanished, though Dick had invoked Scotland Yard.

One point he was determined on without recourse to legal advisers. This he carried through the very next day, taking Nora to see a magistrate and state the case.

Nora, as the heiress to her father's estate, made an application to examine a supposed secret recess in the house known as Engadee, on the assumption that certain documents were concealed there.

Of course the magistrate refused. It was not in his province and provided a bad precedent; setting apart its utterly illegal aspect, he would be exceeding his powers, and so forth. Besides, the application was informal; it should have been made by the widow, etc.

"Very well," exclaimed Dick, somewhat nettled at the refusal, "I'll do it myself. I'm a J.P., though not for that district; but I'll find out who is, and get him to undertake the job."

"He and you can both be held liable for illegal interference with private property."

"Who'll hold us liable? I'll chance it," laughed Dick.

The J.P. for the district, when he was unearthed, agreed to chance it also. He had often wondered over

Engadee, and jumped at Dick's suggestion as a streak of adventure.

Mrs. Ireton was the rightful individual to head the party, but she had heard so much of ghosts, whisperings, terrified swagmen and startled sundowners, that nothing would tempt her near the place again. As Ireton was away in Queensland seeing to his own affairs, responsibility settled on Nora Diss, or rather she seized it rapturously, quite as eager for adventure as her male companions. There was something inspiriting in snapping one's fingers at the law, and being the heroine of this quest into spookland and mystery.

The local J.P., one James Markington, drove them over in his buggy. He thoughtfully brought a kit of tools and a bit of rope, which he announced as "for the burglary."

"It's dead against the law," he advised cheerfully.

The others agreed with enthusiasm. It is the gambling spirit, peculiar to the children of the Southern Cross more than to any other nation.

"There'll be a rare old 'do' when it's known," said the J.P.

"That's just what I want," replied Dick. "If our action will only prompt the supposed owner of the place to seek legal redress, we'll know where we are, and where she is, but as matters stand there's not a soul to say 'boo' to us."

The old couple who were in charge certainly uttered a shrill "boo" of remonstrance, but lapsed into scared silence at the J.P.'s order, and hung in the rear of the intruders.

"Yes, come along," called Dick. "We'll want you as witnesses."

"I'll lose my billet," whined the man.

"Then if you do I'll find you another, and give you a written guarantee on the spot."

"Oh, sir, if you could get me a job out of this. It's fair wore me out,"

"What has? You're not paying any particular attention to the place; you do no outside work that I can see."

"It's not the work, sir," he began, eagerly, then stopped at a warning glance from his wife.

"What is it, then?"

The man and the woman stared in a blank way at the other three. Nora took up the parable.

"Is it something you do not understand?"

They nodded eagerly. The man moistened his lips as if desirous of speaking.

"A ghost?"

"No, no, miss; not a ghost."

They spoke together, evidently determined to diminish or deny the reputation attached to the place. Perhaps it was part of official instructions.

"But you have seen *something*?"

"No, no, miss, only *heard*."

"Well, can't you say what you heard? Voice, sound, speech?"

"Nothing like that, sir. It was like as when you take a long, long breath, as if you was just done up—dead beat."

"A sigh?"

The man nodded. His own description sounded better.

"Where did you hear it?"

"Along the stairs, always along the stairs, and sometimes in the rooms."

"Any particular time?"

"In the daytime; I never went through the house at night. Lately, the missis and me go about together."

"Your wife? Does she hear it, too?"

"She heard it first."

The woman found her tongue now.

"My man didn't bleeve me at first, not till he heard it hisself; so then we told the agents, but they didn't take no notice, and we packed up to go, when one of

them come down and said it was just something to do with the way the rooms was built ; that we wasn't to say nothing ; but if we stayed we'd get a rise. So we stayed."

"Do you think the agent heard it ? "

"He wasn't alone in none of the rooms. He said : ' Come round with me and show me what you mean,' and talked loud the whole time. He was off again in a hower ; while we have bin here for months and months."

"Yet you saw nothing ? Only heard the strange sigh ? "

The pair again looked at each other, not unwilling to speak, but unable to express themselves.

"Nothing that could be called anything, like what you read about ; but two nights ago, *her* picture was pulled off the wall ! "

"Ah ! " cried Dick. " I forgot that picture might be of use. You mean the painting of Mrs. Merch, the former owner's widow, that hung in the billiard-room ? "

"That's it, sir. We heard something fall ; but didn't go to look till the morning, and there it lay on the floor. But the wire wasn't broke, and the hook was still in the wall. What do you make of that ? It didn't fall. It was *pulled* off ! "

"We'll go there presently. Let's get upstairs first and see what we want."

The couple followed with more confidence now ; but when Dick pointed the square oak terminal banister to his companions, and caught the great knob on the top, the woman screamed under her breath and clutched him.

"Don't touch it, sir ; don't touch it. Just there I heard it first."

Dick was exerting all his strength to turn the knob without avail. His friend, the J.P., next tugged till the perspiration came, with the same result.

"Here, come along, give's a hand ! " he called to the caretaker, who backed away. The affair evoked superstitious imaginings.

"Let me have another go," Dick struck in. "I don't want to use burglarious instruments if they can be avoided. Ah! It *moves*! IT TURNS!"

He spoke too soon. Probably the knob had yielded slightly to the friction and the pressure, and then stuck again.

Dick lost his hesitation over the "burglarious instruments" and caught the knob in a twitch formed from the rope, while the J.P. gave a blow with the mallet.

"We're on the right track!" he exclaimed excitedly, for this was an adventure to a man living all his days in pastoral peace.

The knob turned obstinately, as if reluctant to reveal the secret entrusted to it for so many years. They fought it inch by inch; gradually it worked round and round until it came out. They saw then that it was not made with any skill, and the hole into which it was fitted was roughly fashioned. It was no workman's doing; the evidence of some unpractised hand showed in the cutting.

The recess was equally rough. This they did not notice, for all three saw that it contained something.

"Nora! This concerns you," whispered Dick. "It's your place to—to——"

The J.P. was not listening. He was tasting the full joy of discovery and meant to make the most of it. In a twinkling his hand dived in and brought up some papers. Dick snatched them from him without ceremony and handed them to Nora. She gave one glance and began to tremble.

"It's father's name! See, see—Thomas Diss! Oh, Dick, I can't read any more."

It was an agreement over a mine dated twenty-six years before between Thomas Diss and Stephen Merch. Pinned to this was a Government document, a mere slip of paper acknowledging a payment concerning "The Glory Hole." Another paper dealt with a report. There were figures in pencil, a reference to the renaming

of the mine as "The Leather Pocket," with items of expenditure, the draft of sale and similar jottings. Nora smoothed out a faded, crumpled sketch.

"Surely it's the picture of this place," she said.

"It's Engledree," cried Dick in amazement. "I recognize it at once."

"It has father's name on the back, look, look—Tom Diss!"

"It really belongs to my father. Tom Diss got it from him and never returned it."

The J.P. did not even glance at it. He was poring over a much folded piece of paper.

"It's Latin, I don't understand it, seems like a prescription."

The figures certainly suggested a prescription, and one or two words were in Latin, but there was a pasted slip containing several words in another language, of which they were quite ignorant.

"Might be Arabic," ventured Nora. The others shook their heads. The puzzle was too much for them.

"Well, we'll fold it up with the rest. What's this?"

Now indeed had they come to the gold. All eyes read together a statement much more recent in appearance than the other papers. The ink and handwriting were fresher. It was dated nine years previously.

This is not a will, for I have nothing to will, save the wish I carry to my grave and to eternity to counteract the evil of my own dishonour. I sold "The Leather Pocket" for £50,000. Tom Diss and I shared alike in the purchase of "The Glory Hole," therefore the half of what I got for the sale of the mine as "The Leather Pocket," which I sold as my sole possession, Diss being dead for many years, should rightly belong to Diss if he were alive. The money has gone, his share as well as my own; my investments have turned out badly, my speculations a frost, a judgment on me for defrauding a dead man of his rights. All that is left is this place—Engadee—which I cannot give up. It is all

that is left of a wrecked life. The Tyrean dye, my soul's ambition, was snatched from me in the moment of victory. I cling to Engadee as my last hope. At least I can die here. After my death, my wife, Looena Merch, has promised to make the restitution I should have done. Engadee is to be sold to raise the sum legally due to Tom Diss as his share in the mine. I know that his widow has married again and is in wealthy circumstances ; she has always been well off. Had she been poor I would not have been dishonest. It did not seem like dishonesty *then* ; but now that life is done for me, I want to get that stain off my soul. Even the writing of this letter gives me relief, for it will come to light in due time should anything arise to delay justice.

STEPHEN MERCH.

The three who read stood in absolute silence, unable to find a word of comment. The caretaker and his wife were against the wall, as if that gave them some support and security in a trying situation.

"It is as if the dead have spoken," whispered Nora.

Markington, the J.P. peered into the hole. It was a shallow, rough recess which readily revealed its contents, Now it was empty.

"There's nothing more," he said.

"I must touch it, the spot where these things and father's name have lain so long," said Nora, and she slowly slid her hand down.

"There is something else ! Look !" She held up a small, uneven substance as big as a pea, partly discoloured, but with just a tiny ridge shining brightly.

"It's a nugget !"

"Probably the first nugget of the mine Poor wretch ! He may have thought it his mascot, and concealed it with the other things. I see it all. He had some sort of qualm about destroying these documents. He may have feared to destroy them, as people do when they hide a will, or he may have meant to make restitution some time or other. This statement bears it out,

as well as his last words to his wife, and that promise. Evidently he distrusted her, or he would have told her of the recess. One thing is certain. The will the widow proved is a fake. She's in for forgery now in addition to her other frauds."

Nora silently put the papers in her bag, as the men replaced the knob.

"Let's go and see this picture," said Dick. "I've an idea about it. I could only describe her to Scotland Yard, but copies can be made of this and distributed. The picture itself can be reproduced. We'll carry it along with us before any supernatural agency takes to destroying it."

The oil painting of the cold, insincere face was standing against the wall. Dick thought there was a venom in the great doll's eyes that the human face emphasized. They packed it up and took it away with them. The old couple were distressed at their departure.

"You'll keep your word, sir? Now all this has taken place, there'll be ructions and we'll suffer."

"Never fear, I'll see you through. Here's my address—and something else." He gave them a sovereign, which essentially put their fears to flight and made them eager for his service.

This ended the search and began the suit. Theoretically the case seemed clear enough; practically the law did not hurry its solemn dignity to say so.

A counter-claim was set up by the mortgagees, the much-worried agents who appealed to the Crown.

The painting taken from Engadee was reproduced and sent to every Government agency in Europe. Looena Merch was charged with compassing the death of Richard Heene; it was the only way to make sure of her arrest. But with so many nations at death-grips one criminal more or less scarcely mattered.

While detectives in many cities kept a watch for her—on earth—nobody thought of locating her in the air, which had proved as fascinating as the circus. Thus

the Louis d'Or had the last word after all, in a way, too, that proved a mad sort of glory, if it did not minimize her treachery.

Attired in masculine overalls and with a pilot she made a courageous flight in hostile territory and engaged a Taube by means in which she had already attained proficiency. Expert knowledge of boomerang throwing gave her skill with the boomerang bomb, the clever invention of Melbourne men, and in reality a powerful hand grenade gyrating on the boomerang principle of flight.

With characteristic secrecy, the Louis d'Or kept her plans to herself. The French authorities were in ignorance; the Germans mystified.

She dealt out death and damage in a reckless chase, but the throwing of the grenades brought her under the enemy's fire, and the machine was hit. Though she and her pilot managed to regain French soil they had both received fatal injuries. The Louis d'Or lived long enough to disclose her identity with a triumphant challenge that those who were her accusers might give as good an account of themselves.

CHAPTER FIFTY-NINE.

Prophecy and Proof make good wedding-bells.

DICK HEENE did not wait for the straightening out of the Engadee puzzle. Within a month of his return Nora and he were married. It was no time for a gay wedding with the *débâcle* of a world war filling hearts with sorrow; the money that would in other circumstance have been spent over empty social conventions went to the war fund.

Saint Sylva's Pool held a true augury.

There was still another surprise before romance lifted her long-trained skirt and retired to the borders of fairyland.

The recess in the oak banister held more marvellous secrets than mining records. In the half-obliterated paper with its jumble of chemical formulæ and Eastern words lay the very heart's desire of Stephen Merch.

Nobody could make anything of it. It had the appearance of a prescription; a chemist shook his head and suggested it might be one of the innumerable concoctions men try in the hope of discovering gold among baser stuff.

An Oriental scholar easily read the Eastern words as a verse in Arabic:

"To capture is to lose; to triumph is to grieve; wisdom is sorrow."

There the mystery remained as not worth any more trouble. Nora treasured the paper as a relic. What-

ever it might be Stephen Merch thought it of sufficient value to preserve with the bond that held him to the dead.

Sometimes she took it out to muse over it in the half hope that the meaning might be revealed to her. Why should Stephen Merch be so impressed with a sentence in Arabic that he must gum it on this paper? There was no particular philosophy in the sentence. She wondered where he got it and what was the context.

One day, when curiosity grew keener than usual, she held the slip against a strong light to see if another text were on the side gummed down. Perhaps it was the under text Stephen Merch meant to preserve and made a mistake.

The next moment she cried out in excitement, for the paper did conceal something; some words in Merch's handwriting!

Nora waited till she was calmer, then carefully damped the gummed text and sat quietly with what patience she could assume before venturing to peel off the paper.

Dick came in while this was going on and began to laugh.

"You look like a priestess over some mystic rite, sweetheart!" Then he, too, became excited as she deftly pulled away the text, leaving some words visible.

"Latin again and chemistry; he must have been trying to invent something. Perhaps he hoped to invent a wash for turning everything into gold."

"Why should he gum the text over it?"

Dick was staring hard without seeing or even hearing. His own words had started a train of thought.

One supreme wish dominated Stephen Merch during the last years of his life—the manufacture of the famous Tyrean purple. Could this be the chemical formula? When he was wandering about the world he amassed the floating knowledge of many nations. Probably chance put him in possession of a secret, or likely as

not he got possession of it in the same way as he had built Engadee.

"If this is what I think, it may revolutionize a trade," he said. "I'll send it to Edward Burston."

That was how Heene Limited added another industry to their Australian stock and made the Tyrean purple a special branch of the business, for Burston lost no time in testing the formula and cabling the result.

Whether it was the veritable purple of Tyre or not could scarcely be decided after so many centuries, but it was the most wonderful purple dye on the market, rich, lustrous, lasting, and applicable to any material, so that it might well wear its distinctive title.

.

"Gumming" was to prove a greater industry than they foresaw. Owing to the war they found the trade at a standstill. From being in the hands of the enemy it was in nobody's hands—forgotten, collapsed. Within a month it was revived. With Heene Limited at work the labour market was relieved of its unemployed; commercial Australia awakened to a sense of its vegetable products.

From the east coast the work swept round to Western Australia, where thousands of tons of gum were obtainable from the blackboy and *Zamia* palm. The latter yielded a starch suitable for many by-products. The blackboy came into greater prominence because of the vegetable tar of remarkable pitch value it produced. In times of peace this could be manufactured into valuable lacquers and varnishes, goods that were once supplied to the Australian market by Germany. Now, in war, these gave way to the quest for the death-dealing picric acid.

"Gumming" on Kangaroo Island was practically dead. From the stupor of unemployment it awoke to tremendous vitality. The grass tree, from which the Yacca gum is obtained, grows to a larger size on the

island than elsewhere. It also gives a better yield of gum than the trees on the mainland.

Not one Australian in a hundred understood what "gumming" meant; certainly few people gave a thought to Yacca gum, until a sudden rush set in for labour.

"We've set the place humming with the gumming," laughed the Mayor of Locker Gully.

The picturesque routine of the work appealed to artists, who found material for their pencils and were not above taking a hand themselves. Postcards and newspaper illustrations made "gumming" popular. The method of extracting the gum was more elaborate than the primitive way at first adopted.

The workers are in sections of three: one man going ahead to trim the trees of leaves and burnt gum; the second following with a "boat" or "cradle" to be placed beside the tree trunk as he cuts the gum with an axe; the third collecting this and piling it into a heap, when it is thrown into a kind of sieve known as a "jigger" to take out the leaves; thence to a winnower to blow away the small particles of charcoal and dust, and separate the coarse from the fine. After this comes the grading, testing, and packing into sacks for transit and subsequent treatment.

The patriotic spirit of the Heenes and Torridge met with enthusiastic recognition. Marine fibre could not be transformed into gun-cotton without tremendous expenditure; nor could Yacca gum flash all at once into lyddite. Yet as time wore on the hopes that were raised of both commodities came to fruition. It was as if the very growths of sea and land joined issue with the human entities working for the dear homeland in her hour of need.

Men and women came forward in their thousands and tens of thousands, strong and courageous of spirit, steadfast in nobility of aim and effort, and, greater than all else, exalted by unity of soul.

The process of extracting the "pickaninny picric" was not so easy as Torridge's words conveyed. Even with skill and science joined hand in hand, months of patient, continuous, watchful effort went by.

At last a distinctly Australian explosive was produced, the frank full-hearted offering of a young nation to the land that gave it birth, the fervent expression of a people eager to attest their place on the shining scroll of PROOF.

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Raban Heene's surmise did not fall wide of the mark. The firm of Falcott & Co. was a fizzle. They lacked sufficient means to purchase adequate dredging machinery and simply dropped out unheard of by the general public.

Yet some outside influence was at work. Men were seeking information about extents of fibre-clad beach, men who gave neither hint nor sign of nationality other than English. If it were spying it was clumsily done and too late, for the land was alive.

"If the Commonwealth has cut its wisdom teeth," said Raban Heene, "it will take over the whole coast extent of fibre-growth in Australia, and thus hold a monopoly of what is essentially a national asset. It has cotton enough to Kingdom Come—a cotton gold mine."

He lived to see his words justified.

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